



Citizen-Board Member

Parks & Recreation Advisory Board Orientation Booklet

Department of Parks and Recreation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why this Booklet	1
Words and Acronyms	1
The Park Rec Jungle	1
The Chosen One	1
The Shaky Halo.....	2
The Guiding Light.....	2
The Group Upstairs	2
Thou Shall Not Sin	2
The Name	2
Types of Park Rec Boards	3
Why Do We Have Boards	3
The Ideal Board.....	3
Board Members.....	3
How Big is a Park Rec Board	4
How Long are Park Rec Terms	4
Re-Appointment/Re-Election	4
Who Gets Paid What.....	4
Nepotism	4
Perks and Freebies	4
The New CBM Orientation	5
Basic Material for Meeting.....	5
It's a Job – Requires Work	5
You Need to Know Quickly.....	5
Tired Eyeballs	5
The Board Members' Authority.....	6
Length of Board Meetings	6
Stick to Agenda/Why Have One	6
Exaggeration in Speech	6
Learn by Asking	7
The Chair	7
Watch the Chair Carefully	7

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Do Not Be One of the Chairman's Problems.....	7
Learn to Count	8
Never Forget Who the Customers Are	8
The Newly Elected Board Member.....	8
Introduction to the Media.....	8
The Board Member's Mouth.....	9
Dirty Linen	9
Meeting Surprises	9
Single Issue CBM.....	9
Crusaders Bite	9
Xerox Meeting	10
Your Park Rec Annual Allowance	10
Budget Preparation	10
Selling Your Budget.....	10
Budget Cuts	11
Stop Talking about Money.....	11
Fees and Charges.....	11
The Director	11
What Does the Director Do	12
Tell the Director What You Think	12
Be The Devil's Advocate	12
Technical Jargon.....	12
Resident's View of Park Rec.....	13
Build Park Rec Identity.....	13
Daily Contacts with Customers	13
Home Telephone Calls.....	13
Your State Park Rec Association	14
National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA)	14
Why go to Meetings out of Town.....	14
Steal Ideas and Improve Park Rec.....	15
The Merry-Go-Round Stops.....	16
NRPA Code of Ethics.....	16

HOW TO SURVIVE AS A PARK AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER

Why This Booklet

Congratulations! You are now a member of a Park & Recreation Advisory Board. There are almost 30,000 of us in the U.S. and 35% of us are female. And, most of us were told this volunteer position would not take any time – that's the first lie we were told.

The Educators tell us that we are assuming a civic responsibility, as part of a group, to provide Park & Recreation services to the residents. Sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

We all want to succeed. If someone would only tell us – in words we can understand – just what we are supposed to do.

This Booklet is written by a Park & Recreation Advisory Board Member who for more than 30 years has been one of those responsible for providing Park & Recreation services in his community. He is trying to share his experiences (good & bad) with you.

But My Community is Different – of course – they all are. However, the problems and solutions are the same everywhere and we are trying to save you time and energy. Energy that you will surely need if you are going to do the job right.

Words and Acronyms

Like all fields of work certain words are used that are not readily understood by new people. We have limited these to the few given below...to make it easier for you...

Director Director of the park and recreation agency.
Agency Department or Organization that is responsible for delivery of Parks & Recreation
CBM Abbreviation used for Citizen-Board Member
Commissioner Board member in certain states
Customers Residents in your community, the customers of your service.
Municipality A city, town, township, village, county, or other geographical area providing services to its residents.
Park Rec..... Abbreviation used for Parks & Recreation.
Residents Customers, and for your own good do not forget this
Trustee Board member in certain areas

The Park Rec Jungle

You will find that Park Rec organizations are confusing. There are many different ways to provide Park Rec services. We are only interested in the one we have in our town; after all we live there. (More on this later in this booklet.)

To make it easy for you we have selected a 7 person Park Rec Board to discuss this booklet. All Board members are appointed for 3 year terms. The reader can mentally adjust the situations to the size or his/her Advisory Board and the area of service.

The Chosen One

At first this is an ego trip. They picked the right person. You can feel proud, for your qualifications were the best of all.

No matter how you got appointed, whether you are the Mayor's next door neighbor, his fund raiser, his best vote getter, related to a councilman, selected from blue ribbon committee list, the President of the soccer program, or the one who led the protest (about anything) It makes little difference. We all came here from somewhere.

You have met the requirements better than anyone else. There are only 3. The first, be a legal voter; the second, be a resident of the community; and the third and most important – **get the appointment.**

You need no “professional” qualifications to be a member of you local board. You do not need a Master’s Degree in Horticulture, you do not need to know the rules for volleyball, and you do not need to know the difference between a bush and a shrub.

The Shaky Halo

When the thrill of being appointed wears off after a few days, then everyone who has ever been appointed starts wondering if they can handle the assignment.

If it makes you feel any better, all board members felt the same way back when they started, but they lived through it and so will you.

You are one of seven. You cannot make a decision alone – you need 3 others to agree with you – before something happens.

You are part of the team and it takes a while getting used to this.

The Guiding Light

All citizen board members (CBMs) should have a basic goal that guides them in all decisions during their term of office.

May we suggest that you set as a goal, “Providing the Best Park and Recreation Services in the USA for Your Residents”.

Unless you have a positive attitude, you will just wander from meeting to meeting, lost in details and have a mediocre program and facilities.

In providing the best you have fun being a CBM. If it is not fun, tell the appointing authority you wish to step down. Use any excuse you want and let the seat be occupied by another resident, and go do something you enjoy.

The Group Upstairs

You will always be sympathetic towards the person or group who proposed your name for your appointment and to those who voted for the Park Rec program that they can be proud of. Keep them informed of Board’s thinking as a group NOT just your individual thinking.

The Park Rec Board exists because the appointing authority cannot devote the time to park and recreation services. So keep the residents off the Mayor’s back and give the Mayor something to brag about in the Park Rec program. Remember, he or she is human too.

Thou Shall Not Sin

The CBM Branch of National Recreation and Park Association prepared a code of ethics some years ago (in fact one of the writers was chairman of the committee). It was approved by CBM from all parts of the U.S, and it is printed on the back of this booklet.

When in doubt, at any time, read it and stick to it. It keeps you out of trouble.

The Name

The original name was PARKS. This brings back memories of trees, grass, picnics, band concerts, sunburns, mosquitoes, and all the other items involved in youth while enjoying a day in a big open space owned by everyone, and called a PARK.

The beginning of community recreation activity came on the playgrounds. Steel monsters allowed you to go back and forth, up and down, and slide down from top to bottom. Then people got brave and started sports leagues for children and we had a new municipal agency. This was named the Playground and/or Recreation Commission. It was separate from Parks and conversations were held at arm's length between the leaf rakers and ball bouncers.

Quickly however they were combined for efficiency and today both services are provided by the same Park Rec agency. A few communities in the northeastern and northwestern part of the U.S. still have separate departments.

Types of Park Rec Boards

Park Rec services are provided by a Board, a Commission, an Authority, or a Department. The names make sense to the legal and administrative people who set them up and manage them. The residents are confused by them.

We have been told for years that there are 2 basic types:

1. A Policy Board has the authority to make the rules, decide what is to be done, employ the people, in most cases allocate the money, and the primary responsibility to provide Park Rec services to the residents.
2. An Advisory Board gives advice and counsel to the people employed by others to do the work. The advice and counsel can be taken or ignored depending upon the personalities involved. You are on an Advisory Board!

Do not expect to find logic in the organization of Park Rec government at the local or county level in the U.S.A. It does not exist.

Why Do We Have Boards?

It all started back in New England with the Town Meeting when every spring on a wet, muddy day all of the voters met in the local church (largest building in town) and transacted the annual business and made up a budget.

As the towns grew, and the church didn't, they started appointing a few to act or all in various areas of local government. The American way – APPOINT A COMMITTEE.

Thus the Town Council, The Board of Public Works, The School Board, and finally the Playground Board, which was when your great grandfather was born.

The Ideal Board

Different organizations and size of board are ideal subjects for the coffee shop or lounge when you are killing time before the next meeting; leave them there.

This discussion is a time waster. You are a member of the only parks & recreation advisory board in your community. It has been set up by law and you and the other 6 have the responsibility to provide Park Rec services to your residents. Make the system work and succeed. You live THERE.

Board Members – How Do You Get To Be One?

There are 2 ways:

1. **Appointed** by Mayor, City or Town Council, County Board, Governor, or some other legal authority, for a specific term. Some can be re-appointed, some cannot. 90 plus % of Board member are appointed.

2. **Elected** by the residents for a specific term of years. (Usually run on the non-partisan ballot.) They can be re-elected depending upon the voters' attitude. Less than 10% of Board members are elected. Most all in Illinois and North Dakota are elected. There are some in isolated areas in other parts of the U.S.

How Big is a Park Rec Board?

Park Rec Boards vary greatly in size. There are as few members as 3 in the northeast up to 30 in county systems in the Midwest.

How Long are Park Rec Terms?

These run from 1 year to 6 years. You may get a full term or get appointed to a partial term.

Re-Appointment or Re-Election

All CBM's know their term of office whether appointed or elected. You know the date when you must vacate your seat. Like Cinderella, you either must leave quietly or obtain another appointment or win another election.

Should you try again???? This is a personal decision, ONLY you can make it.

Remember, if you state early that you are not going to be a candidate again, the other CBM's consider you a "Lame duck" at once and your effectiveness drops quickly.

Who Gets Paid What?

You do not. The great majority of Park Rec CBMs do not receive compensation for serving their community, just like School Board members or Library Trustees. It is no different than the church or social agency boards you may have served on before.

A small minority in some states are paid some insignificant token amount set 50 years ago that does not cover the gas to go to the meetings. This runs from \$10 per meeting to \$100 a month in a wealthy western state.

Practically all agencies pay Board members' expenses to attend regional, state, or national meetings. And, the decision as to who goes where, and when, is decided among the board members – with much conversation and sometimes emotion.

Nepotism

This practice, commonly known as hiring your wife and children or any relatives has gotten lots of CBMs on the front page of the local newspaper. You try and use logic as a defense. The issue is emotional. You can make a reasonable explanation, but the doubt still remains in the residents' mind. You **always** lose on this one.

Perks and Freebies

A very touchy subject and 30,000 CBMs would give 30,000 different replies. We recommend you do nothing that you wouldn't want on page 1 of your local newspaper.

Eating the cookies at the Senior Citizen's reception is a bit different from your family swimming free daily at the pool; or you, your wife, and the couple next door playing golf free twice a week at the golf course.

CBMs get in more trouble with this issue than any other and lose. They are convicted in people's minds when the newspaper story is printed and no one listens to the explanation. You also **always** lose on this one.

The New CBM Orientation

The Park Rec boards in the U. S. as a group, do a miserable job in explaining the CBM job to the new CBMs. This is the duty of the continuing CBMs on the board who are hampered by never having been properly oriented themselves.

The **lucky** new CBM is told where to sit, and where the rest rooms are located.

The director tries to help. They want you to know what's going on fast. So, they take on the difficult task of teaching you. Many do this by giving copies of all ordinances since 1921, minutes of all meetings since World War II, and copies of all staff memos in the last 5 years. This material is sent to your house in a Park Rec truck and unloaded in your front hall.

If you are a normal new CBM, you figure ways to avoid reading all that stuff as it does not make any sense to you anyhow.

Basic Material for Meeting

Request Agenda and all supporting papers from your administrator 48 hours minimum before the formal meeting. So you can read the material, in a relaxed environment, at home, and be properly prepared to discuss the items at the meeting – in an intelligent manner.

Many years ago, when we first started to go to Park and Rec meetings, we told our director of the **48** hour rule. We stated if we did not have the material **48** hours in advance we would not come to the meeting; and the second time it happened we would issue a press release.

So we have enjoyed 30 years of advance information – and the residents have benefited all those years.

It's A Job – Requires Work

Before every meeting you get a package of papers telling you about what's on the agenda - facts of issues, staff thinking, etc. You cannot function unless you read and absorb this material BEFORE you go to the meeting.

If at 6:58 pm you arrive for the 7:00 pm meeting, sit down and open your sealed envelope for the first time and quickly glance through the 'stuff', how well are you representing your residents? You should think up an excuse for resigning and spend your time where you enjoy what you would be doing.

You Need to Know Quickly

At, or before, that first meeting, you should determine how much, if any, personal liability insurance coverage the CBM's have. You are performing a civic duty without compensation. The least the civic body should do, is cover the unpaid CBMs for the actions they take or fail to take when acting as members of the Board. If they tell you they have none, we suggest you get uninvolved quickly. The job can be a nightmare of legal fees even a judgment against you. Most CBM's are covered by the municipality as a matter of policy, however some still are not. If in doubt ask your director to ask the City Attorney for legal counsel (i.e. options).

Tired Eyeballs

This is a disease contracted by CBMs for Park Rec. All staff people send you paper to read, study, analyze, and to comment upon at the drop of a hat. They do not understand that CBMs look for reasons not to read 100 page books written in technical language that they do not understand.

The **SOLUTION** to tired eyeballs is a heart to heart talk with your director. You do not want anything put in your mail that does not have some form of explanation from staff. That is why it is important for you to ask questions of the director at meetings.

The Board Members' Authority

You are part of a group, or board; you have 14% of the action from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. every fourth Thursday of the month.

You do not have authority any other time, You do not give staff instructions, overrule softball umpires, change game schedules, issue press releases, tell employees to clean up their act, or all those other things.

You tell the director; he/she is responsible for the day to day operation, including all staff.

Of course you can talk to the staff – anytime – as you go to different parks and visit various programs. Ask them about what is going on, how the residents like it, etc. The only no-no is do not give them instructions; that's not your job. Tell the director what you saw and what your thoughts were about the program, he needs to know.

Length of Board Meetings

Board meetings are where we approve the minutes and waste the hours. This is the American way. The longer the meeting, the less gets done.

Any board meeting lasting more than 2 hours is a waste of the time of those attending. Get the garbage off the agenda. Don't chatter about details. Speak up on the issues – but only once. Restating your case weakens your position each time you speak.

Ruthlessly insist upon organized, well run meeting so the time of every board member will be saved. You will be surprised at how fast you will get unanimous support.

Stick to Agenda or Why Have One

If you want to get home by midnight you must stick to the agenda. Most gavel holders are shy about interrupting other CBMs but if Board conversation wanders all over the field it's a long night, Item 7 is the Country Western Dance Classes and that's all we talk about until we dispose of this item. When you ask for the floor your subject should be the Dance Classes, **NOT** anything that comes to your mind.

Exaggeration in Speech

Some people use this for emphasis. Do not be one of them. Your remarks quickly get discounted heavily by the other CBMs.

"A lot of people have been calling me." Now all the others get some calls, not many, and neither do you, When a CBM says lots of people have been calling me, the other CBMs say to each other, "I wonder who called?"

The same goes for "many people stopping me on the street," means ONE person.

It is better to state that Susie Smith called me about the boys' soccer program and I said that I would bring her concern before the Board at the next meeting. *Be sure you call Susie back after the meeting.*

Meeting Discussions

You must devote time here. And, your involvement goes a long way toward getting 3 more votes.

Do not be afraid to write you're thought out in longhand before the meeting. Most of us are poor "ad libbers" and are not used to this type of discussion.

Always define how the **action** will **benefit** the **residents** -- those are the people you serve.

Learn by Asking

A famous football coach says his father taught him to keep his mouth shut as you never learn anything while you are talking.

Same for CBMs. Ask questions, ask for others' opinions, ask who, what, when, where, and why frequently. You will learn much more than you knew when you came in – learn how to listen.

The Chair

Or Chairwoman, or chairperson, or chair, or President, or whatever you call the person – the one with the gavel – exists because no one has ever found a better way to run a meeting.

He or she is there because,

1. It is their turn.
2. No one else wants the job.
3. They have been there so long no one has the guts to nominate anyone else.
4. They have demonstrated the ability to lead and the others are confident with them. (This does not happen often.)

Watch the chair carefully.

You may get the gavel next. Who me? Yes, you. Stranger things have happened. Elections are political and you may get the 4 votes next time for all kinds of reasons you have yet to discover.

Gavel holders lose their freedom as a member, but not their vote. They are continually looking for common ground and trying to get 4 people to agree on something -- **ANYTHING.**

They try to keep the other members from talking themselves into a corner. If the gavel holder is not careful, the vote ends up 1-1-1-1-1-1-1 – and midnight comes fast.

Do Not Be One of the Chairman's Problems

The Chairman's problems are the other CBMs, especially the following 'four horsemen of doom.'

1. The Motion Maker

Who believes that the longer the motion, the more effective. This CBM could never repeat the motion verbatim because they do not remember where they started. Suggest to him he read the 10 Commandments for an example of clarity and brevity.

2. The Compulsive Talker

Who believes in talking first on each item while he gathers his thoughts. He thinks out loud. He works on the theory then makes his decision while he talks and the others are not able to oppose him – at least initially.

3. The I Hate to Make a Decision CBM

Who nibbles around the edges of decisions, ignoring the facts involved, worrying about making someone unhappy and not really wanting to take a position on ANY issue. He has never understood that nothing happens until somebody makes a decision. He has voted PRESENT at least once in the last 87 meetings. Solution? Resign. Then he will not have to make any Park Rec decisions.

4. The Wet Blanket

Who injects those famous words – 'What's it gonna cost' – in the beginning explanation of any program or project. He does not want to hear the proposed benefits to the residents or the long range savings. He just makes quick depressing comments that can stifle new ideas.

Learn to Count -- Fast

You are one of 7. You quickly learn to count. Unless you can get 3 others to agree with you, move on to the next agenda item. It takes a majority to get anything done, even to adjourn the meeting.

The other 6 will react to you based upon how you treat them. Remember your courtship days. Court the other 6 because you will succeed only with the support of the others. Loners on a board just put in long hours of being outvoted. It is no fun.

Those who are proprietors, self-employed, and those who work alone in life sometimes have trouble adjusting to working as part of the group. You are part of a team that is responsible collectively and it takes some time to get used to this.

Never Forget Who the Customers Are

Park Rec Board meetings are usually held with Board and staff people present. Most Boards hold open meetings of course, **but no one comes**. It's not the CBM's fault if no one comes.

It's easy to become self-centered and to forget who the customers are, the residents who are paying for the services you are delivering.

Never get into any discussion at a meeting without asking yourself how this action will affect the customers. This is why you are sitting at the table, to represent the residents, all of them. Do right by them.

The Newly Elected Board Member

Most candidates for elected office, unless they have a burning local issue, have the standard American candidate's platform.

DO MORE...AND SPEND LESS...both at the same time.

You get enthusiastic – print up flyers – buy ads -- make speeches – say lot of things to everyone and do not think too carefully in the emotion of a campaign.

You read your material carefully, your opponents do also. But, you won so what! The people who read what you wrote and said more carefully than you or your opponents were the incumbent CBMs who you will now join as a member of a team with 14% of the action.

They frequently read into your words something other than what you meant and they can find upside down periods in your campaign statements.

They cannot normally answer you. They have the present responsibility for Park Rec. But, tension points can be created that unfortunately you are not aware of.

Now you, in complete innocence, arrive at your first meeting and wonder why one or more seem like cold fish. You better take it easy in the beginning until they get to know you better. After all, they have the other 6 votes and you need 3 of them to get anything done during your term.

For those of you who were appointed vs. elected, the message is still true. Other board members will remember the comments you made before being appointed.

Introduction to the Media

If your Board meetings always have media present, you quickly learn how to act AND watch your tongue.

If you are like most Park Rec CBMs you usually see the media when a burning local issue has raised its ugly head. If you have had no experience in this area, don't make the mistake of ignoring what the media

wants. They want a story. A tree planting does not excite them. They want controversy – dissent – page 1 news – and can only get it from CBM comments.

Be careful of what you say, they go to press, you don't.

The Board Member's Mouth

Under the Constitution you are guaranteed free speech. No one ever argues that point.

As a Park Rec Board member, it is smart to let the Board Chair talk to the media for the Board and the other 6 refer all questions to the Chair during his or her term.

Most CBMs are not experienced with media people what are looking for a story, The other 30,000 board members will testify that at one time or another they had a garbled story in the media which got them in trouble. So a word to the wise!

If you are attempting to obtain support on a specific community issue for Park Rec never go to the **MEDIA** first. You first go to the other 6 CBMs on your Board. Never forget that you need 3 other CBMs to vote like you do to take action. Don't bruise them unnecessarily.

After action is taken on the issue and you bruised some people, it is more difficult to get their support on the next item on the agenda. And, some CBM have long memories.

Dirty Linen

If there is something you do not like about the Board, the staff, the program, or the facilities, do not tell the residents **FIRST**.

If you do that, you give the media and the community a controversy. This is not in the best interests of an outstanding Park Rec operation.

Talk to the other Board members or the administrator. Always try to solve this type of issue in-house first. You may not have all the facts, so don't get embarrassed. Often you can solve the problem in a conversation or two and the community will benefit.

Meeting Surprises

Never let anyone demand you take action on something new that you have never heard of before the meeting. Insist on time to study BOTH sides of the new issue. Ask that the item be placed on the agenda for the **next** meeting. Request the director investigate and prepare recommendations for the next meeting.

The impetuous CBM who says 'oh it sounds ok let's do it' may end up with a bloody nose.

Single Issue CBM

Starting out this way is no sin. Many, including the writer, started out that way. The secret is not to stay that way. You have lots of decisions to make that have nothing to do with your single BURNING issue. No matter how strong you feel, unless you can convince 3 other CBMs to agree, you lose. BUT, by being cooperative and being reasonable and sympathetic with the other CBMs you will be surprised how fast the other 3 votes appear.

Crusaders Bite -- You

We all have a habit of classifying people who do not agree with us as nuts and fruits or some other uncomplimentary term.

Residents do not get involved unless they feel wronged. Facts have nothing to do with this; it is all emotional.

When people complain, treat them as you would wish to be treated. Or, you will **create crusaders**. They are the opponents for Park Rec when the next appointment vacancy comes up.

The proverbial little old lady in tennis shoes will have you in court before you know it, not to mention page 1 of your local newspaper.

In almost every unpleasant issue of this type...it goes back to one of the CBMs making a comment that compounded the situation. And, the yelling and screaming gets started.

Take the part of the crusader, Promise to get the facts. Guarantee their treatment. Promise that they will be notified before any action is taken.

Convert crusaders to Park Rec boosters with concern for their point of view.

Xerox Meetings

When every meeting is just like the last one: we approved the minutes, the payroll, the bills, read the correspondence, listened to a couple of interested citizens, rubber stamped a couple of staff program proposals and gave out a certificate of appreciation, you are in a rut. You are custodians of a Park Rec organization going downhill.

What is being done to develop new facilities? Programs? Anything to perk up and excite the residents? You don't need money, you need enthusiasm and ideas.

Recognize when you are attending Xerox meetings.

Your Park Rec Annual Allowance

Quickly, you will be introduced to the all American sport called BUDGET and most of the time it is the excuse given any time you propose something.

When the budget is prepared, BE INVOLVED. This is Park Rec's allowance for the next 12 months.

There is never enough money to do all the things Park Rec wants to do.

Budget Preparation

Budgets are usually prepared by directors as they have the records and files. They use a step process, checking frequently with the Board, so they can determine the Board's wishes for the coming year.

When you receive the first draft of the budget determine what is included and what is not. Have the director explain the budget to you and be sure you understand what is in the **first draft**.

In Board discussions, do your job. Fill your role. Dig. Probe. Question everything.

Do not accept the "same as last year" answer. Why is it the same? Why do we do it? Can we do better another way? Is the investment successful? You get the idea.

Don't be afraid to make changes. CBMs who do not like to do this because the budget would have to be retyped are "chickening out."

Selling Your Budget

Assume your budget authority is a City or County governing board.

You send the director to submit and defend your budget. He is looked upon as another bureaucrat, like all the others presenting budgets. His annual 4 letter word is MORE. The members of the governing body are aware of the toothless position of the presenter, smile sweetly, glance at the clock and give every speaker his turn at the podium.

But if the Park Rec Board is in attendance, and making the presentation, the governing board members' attitudes change. They think, hey, CBMs are just like us: they are not paid, we appoint them, they vote, help me in my campaigns, go to the same school or church or bowl with me, etc. A different attitude exists. The governing body realizes that CBMs are telling what they will do and/or what they have cut out this year. I wonder how that will affect my area of town. What will the parents say? You get the idea. Try it. It WORKS.

Budget Cuts

Many municipal Park Rec agencies have severe budget cuts in recent years due to the loss of outside money. The old fashioned answer to this one was that children did not vote and Park Rec was just ahead of Cemeteries on the municipal priority list.

Today, with your heavy program and facility use by adults, this is no longer the case. It is another reason that adults, both residents and CBMs, must be involved in the budget approval process.

Never reduce your budget by cutting 10% of everything. If you try, you sure had a sloppy budget to start with. Always cut 100% of certain programs. Think about it for a while.

Stop Talking About Money

This is a trap we continually fall into without thinking.

"Park Rec does not have enough money" falls on deaf ears of a higher authority trying to put 10 pounds of programs in a 5 pound bag, or to residents who have trouble enough making all their monthly payments and buying groceries.

We use **money** as it is a verbal short cut. It saves us time to say we are \$100 or \$100,000 short of what we need.

The trap is that we forget everyone is an expert on money. We all learned the decimal system in school, are aware of what money is, and feel confident about being an expert in a conversation about it.

Park Rec seems to lose when we talk money. So, what do we do?

Easy, talk benefits to the residents. This personalizes the conversation. The Board has cut out the grade school soccer program for boys and girls due to lack of funds. What happens? The soccer parents unite with an issue and head for the mayor and city council to state their case.

These groups are normally most effective.

When residents gather together and protest, elected or appointed officials get uncomfortable. When delegations of residents appear at meetings, *usually something positive (for the residents objecting) comes out of the effort.*

Fees and Charges

These started with expensive facilities like golf courses and swimming pools years ago and were accepted by the public.

In recent years budgets have not kept pace with inflation, so most Park Rec agencies have heavily increased Fees and Charges. Many places have Fees and Charges as more than 50% of their budget. It's a method of keeping the same level of services in spite of inflation and cut budgets. Your director can explain how fees and charges are not discriminatory and how scholarships can be used. All of us had to overcome this mental block.

The Director

Unless you are a member of a Board in a tiny community, you will have a director, a full time employee who is responsible for the day to day operation of the Park Rec agency.

As a group these people are well trained, competent, and understand their role. They are responsible to work for the board and quickly observe how the board wishes to work, and the special interest areas of the individual members.

What Does the Director Do?

This varies with the size of the community of course.

The director is like a City Manager, School Supt., Police Chief, Librarian, or any other person responsible for operating an agency or department.

He or she hires and fires the employees; you do not.

He or she runs the day to day operation; you do not.

He or she executes policy; you do not. The Director sits at the foot of the table and does not have 14% of the action.

He or she works with the group of 7 people and can count (quicker than the Board can) and will do what the majority wants.

Tell the Director What You Think

The director wants to please the CBM, this is his/her job. He or she is prepared to do it daily.

The director cannot do it unless you tell him what you want. He or she is not paid to read minds, if you tell the other CBMs, the public, the media you are compounding the problem.

Tell the director your likes and dislikes, what you think, what you think the public thinks. They want to know. You are not doing your job unless you talk to the director.

Be The Devil's Advocate

The staff proposes and the Board disposes; -- a simple phrase that covers the usual procedure of Park Rec.

The normal Board meeting, while public by law, is held with Board and staff only. Rarely does the citizenry bother to attend.

The CBM becomes familiar with the staff, gains confidence in them, and normally supports their proposals. This can be a trap for CBMs if you are not careful.

Your responsibility is to the residents. Your job is to question all proposals to determine if they are well prepared, well thought out, and will benefit the residents. You are part of a small group given the responsibility to act for the residents, all of them in your community.

You may be hesitant, since you are acquainted with staff to embarrass them, by asking questions, expressing your concerns, and playing the "devil's advocate," but that is your role.

When the proposal is adopted, the Board is responsible for it – and must stand behind it. Soooooo, be sure you agree with it...BEFORE...it is adopted. You don't want to end up with "egg on your face" when it reaches the residents.

Technical Jargon

Park Rec like other fields seems to have developed a vocabulary of its own which is composed of words not in common usage.

Most CBMs let the staff continue to impress each other until they start using the technical vocabulary on the CBM and the RESIDENTS. This is when you shut them off and demand they speak in a language that everyone understands to eliminate confusion and misunderstanding.

The basic rule is, speak to me in a language I understand if you want me to understand what you are saying.

Residents' View of Park Rec

Most residents take community government for granted. They complain about taxes, demand more services each year, expect instant service from everyone and never go to any government meetings.

Park Rec is pleasant, fun, and interesting. This is where the residents play, relax and enjoy.

Park Rec does not chase burglars, put out fires, dig up streets, make you buy a permit to fix your garage, or plow your driveway back in when snow arrives.

It is easy to have community support for Park Rec for we have so few negatives in community life.

CBMs can develop community pride in Park Rec. Remember, everybody likes a winner and the residents will brag about what they have, if you give them the opportunity.

Build Park Rec Identity

Everything, animal, vegetable, mineral, should be marked with a logo, symbol, or name of Park Rec agency.

A Park Rec agency is many things to the residents and few know all of the parks and programs.

Park Rec is all over town, in many different locations, so you should tie it together with identification.

Doesn't the director do this? Of course, once **you** start assisting him in building community support.

But, as the representative of the residents you know what they want. Bragging is a form of recreation for many, so give them the chance.

Daily Contacts with the Customers

When you first become a CBM, you are pleasantly surprised at the people who stop and congratulate you. Everybody likes to be congratulated.

Take advantage of every resident contact to ask what they like and dislike about the Park Rec in the community. This is how you serve your constituency. And, **thank them** for their comments.

Never argue with the residents. If you get questions, either answer them or tell them you will check into it and come back to them. Do this within 24 hours and you will be surprised at how quick your reputation grows as a CBM.

Remember a CBM travels a routine path. Your circle of contacts are limited to your neighbors, your church, where you work, and where you play and the majority of the residents are not in your routine path.

You can talk with this group easily; take advantage of every additional contact you make.

Home Telephone Calls

As a CBM you will get phone calls from residents at home; during the normal times like when you are taking a quick nap, when your team on TV is marching for the winning score, or when you have just waxed the floor, and it is still wet between you and the telephone. **Welcome** to the club.

The rule of ten applies here – ten people thought about calling, but only one finally does. So, this is where you make your community reputation as a CBM. Always get the name of the person first. If they tell you they do not want to give their name consider what we do; say that we do not take anonymous phone calls and hang up. It works for us. We like to know who we are talking to, don't you?

LISTEN TO THE QUESTION OR COMPLAINT. It is never a compliment. The last CBM who got unsolicited compliments over the phone from a stranger did so in 1921.

OBTAIN SPECIFIC INFORMATION. If I tell the director that one of his staff told a girl in Evers park that she couldn't do something, etc. some time last week, it is not going to be easy to get an answer for the caller.

If I say to the Director that a girl on the bike was stopped about 3:00 pm near the children's playground Tuesday by a girl in a Park Rec tee-shirt with a whistle around her neck and carrying a clipboard and a name tag that said JULIE, I get an answer back FAST. Remember, you are only hearing one side of the story in a phone call.

Your State Park Rec Association (i.e. North Carolina Recreation & Parks Association – NCRPA)

All 50 states have a State organization. This is composed of primarily directors and staff. And together they accomplish much in training, education, and communication.

Some have a CBM branch composed of people like yourself who have taken some time to learn about Park Rec.

In addition to State Meetings, some hold area meetings. Your director can give you information about this.

The National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA)

This organization, located in Washington, D.C., is composed of all those involved in Park Rec.

NRPA has an Annual Congress every fall and it is well worth attending for CBMs. We recommend it.

One of the branches of NRPA is the Citizen-Board Member Branch composed of CBMs from the 50 states. They have special training sessions each year at the conference that help every CBM do a better job in his or her own community.

Every Park Rec Board should be an "agency" member of NRPA. The publications alone are worth many times the dues.

Again your director can get you information on NRPA. If he can't you shouldn't have hired him/her in the first place.

Why go to Meetings out of Town

It is the easiest way to get new ideas and thoughts for your own community, ideas that have worked for others. You build a program the residents love by being innovative and creative. Most Park Rec ideas do not cost money – just brains.

Your State Organization holds meetings. The NRPA runs Regional meetings, workshops, etc. all the time.

Try one – you'll like it – and your residents will benefit.

Steal Ideas and Improve Park Rec

If you steal an idea from a person, it is not very nice. If you steal a thousand, it is called research.

The Park Rec Boards that seem to win all the Gold Medal Awards each year, and all the other Awards also, seem to be ones who have a CBM representative at the meetings.

Be sure one of your Board members attend. Take turns or have one CBM designated as the Board representative.

After meeting other CBMs from other towns, you start getting ideas of what can be done in your community. Bring some back home and try them out and the residents will love the new ideas.

This is the best shortcut to improving a program that you will ever find.

The Merry-go-Round Stops

Eventually that fateful day will arrive. The day you have to get out of the chair and let your successor sit down.

How you feel at that time depends on what you have accomplished during your term.

Like most, you walk away with pride and satisfaction that you did the best job you knew how to do for your community.

They will rarely thank you in any formal or informal way as residents assume that municipal government goes on and on.

You have been exposed to local government and know what you have accomplished and you smile inwardly; as no one can take that experience away from you, ever.

**National Recreation and Park Association
Citizen Board Member Branch**

Code of Ethics

As a Park and Recreation Board Member, representing all residents in my community, I recognize that:

1. I have been entrusted to provide/recommend park, recreation and leisure services to all residents of my community. These services are available to everyone regardless of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, physical or mental ability.
2. I will respect ideas and opinions expressed by fellow board members, professional staff, and citizens to ensure the best interests of the community.
3. I will respect and support decisions made by the board.
4. I pledge to devote the time and effort necessary to ensure thoughtful and informed decisions by the board.
5. I will adhere to the highest standards of integrity and honesty in all my endeavors to safeguard the public trust.
6. I will work to accomplish the mission of the organization and strive to maintain the trust of those who elected or appointed me and those whom the organization serves.
7. I will serve the interest of people, avoid acts of favoritism toward special interests and avoid use of the board for personal advantage.
8. I understand that my authority is restricted to official meetings and authorized actions of the board.
9. I acknowledge that board members recommend policy, make motions and advise professional staff while directors and staff carry out approved policy.
10. I will support policy that ensures all board meetings are open to the public except in cases where closed meetings are warranted and/or authorized.

This booklet was a replication from "How To Survive As A Park and Recreation Board Member" by Donald F. Bresnan and Regina B. Glover, 2001.

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This booklet is published by the Citizen Board Member Branch of the National Recreation and Park Association to assist Board Members of Park and Recreation Agencies to understand what a Board Members needs to know. The Citizen Board Member (CBM) Branch of NRPA represents all CBM's in the 50 states, provides printed materials, arranges seminars, and meetings, and assists State Associations in training citizen board members from local boards everywhere.

This booklet has been revised to fit the dynamics of the Town of Madison-Mayodan Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.