



Illinois
Park & Recreation
Association

Strategic Plan



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IPRA Board of Directors

Lisa Sheppard, *Board Chair and Executive Director, Glencoe Park District*

Andy Thurman, *Board Chair Elect and Executive Director, Geneseo Park District*

Trisha Breitlow, *Board Past Chair and Executive Director, Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation*

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Focus Group Participants

Members from Chicago Metro, Central, Southern, and Northwest Illinois Regions

Illinois Park and Recreation Foundation

IPRA Sections

Commercial Members

Illinois Association of Park Districts

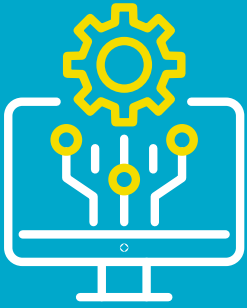
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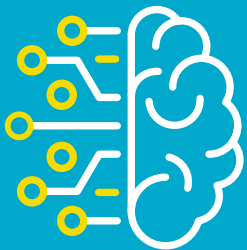
Nikki Ginger, *Project Manager*

Barbara Heller, *Subject Matter Expert*



Mission

“Provide and promote exceptional standards of education, networking, and resources for all professionals in the Illinois park, recreation, and conservation communities.”



Vision

“IPRA leads the nation in providing premier education, networking, and resources for professionals in parks, recreation, and conservation.”

Values



Inclusiveness of diverse stakeholder groups



Fiscal responsibility, accountability, and transparency in all of our activities



Intentionally improve all lives



Creating a forum for uniting the diverse IPRA community around common ideas and future trends

The Process

Fully focused on the future of parks, recreation, and conservation across Illinois, IPRA started off 2023 with an ambitious endeavor to revisit its Strategic Plan. As part of the process, the Association sought input from members and non-members, leaders, partners, Board, and Staff to develop a new set of goals and initiatives for the next five years.

This Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for the future direction of IPRA, it reaffirms its mission, vision, and values, and how the Association continues to support our field. This plan is intentionally high reaching; setting goals that challenge IPRA and adapt to the growing needs of park, recreation, and conservation professionals across Illinois. Importantly, this plan also builds on past successes that have made IPRA such a valuable and reliable resource for its members.

The following pages provide an overview of the process, followed by details of the plan.

Launch

The strategic planning process began with a kickoff that included members of IPRA's Board, Staff, and Foundation. This event served as an introduction to the planning process, aimed at establishing common expectations, and exploring desired outcomes.

IPRA also deployed a Strategic Planning Team comprised of Board, Foundation, and Finance Committee members and IPRA's Executive Director and Communications and Marketing Director. This group was tasked with providing feedback throughout the process and representing the membership as a whole.

Discovery and Engagement

Understanding the depth and breadth of IPRA's programs and member services acted as a foundation to the Strategic Plan. Part of the initial planning process was a review of member materials, annual reports, engagement surveys, workplans, internal documentation, and the previous plan. This review helped to ensure that the new Strategic Plan was built upon—and complemented—previous goals and measures.

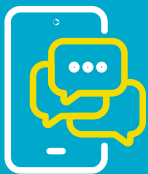
Information from both sources was used to articulate IPRA's strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). Further details regarding the discovery sessions and engagement can be found in the appendix.

Strategic Development

Using feedback gathered through the engagement phase, the Strategic Planning Team, Board, and Staff attended a full-day Strategic Development Workshop where they reviewed the SWOT; discussed the Balanced Score Card; and developed themes, objectives, and initiatives for the plan. The session was followed by a Strategic Refinement workshop where the Strategic Planning Team further reviewed and finalized the themes, objectives, and initiatives. The process concluded with an implementation workshop and action plan where Staff developed initial short-term measures to support the initiatives.

Implementation

The resulting Strategic Plan is designed to serve as a guidepost, directing Staff through day-to-day activities. On an annual basis, the plan's initiatives will be reviewed, and Staff will adjust tactics to respond to the ever-changing park, recreation, and conservation landscape across Illinois.



Engaging members throughout the state was also a priority for IPRA. To gather as much feedback as possible, the Association offered an online portal, Social Pinpoint, and hosted virtual focus groups. The Social Pinpoint site included

a member and non-member survey and an ideas wall for suggestions and voting. This site drew over 300 unique users, 35 ideas wall suggestions, and 308 survey responses.

To complement the online portal, IPRA hosted 13 virtual focus groups that drew over 80 professionals that represented:

- Members from Chicago Metro, Central, Southern, and Northwest Illinois
- Commercial Members
- Board
- Staff
- Illinois Park and Recreation Foundation
- Illinois Association of Park Districts
- IPRA Sections
- Non-Members

Introduction to the Balanced Score Card

The IPRA Strategic Plan is based on the Balanced Scorecard, a strategy framework that emphasizes the cause-and-effect relationship among distinct yet interrelated perspectives: customers, financial performance, internal support processes, and organizational learning and growth. The scorecard focuses on the key drivers of success that lead to the achievement of mission and vision.

The Balanced Scorecard framework includes four themes:

CUSTOMER– To achieve our mission and vision, how should we seek to meet our professionals needs?

FINANCIAL– To succeed financially, how do we show evidence of our financial stewardship to our members?

INTERNAL BUSINESS– To satisfy our members, which business practices must we do extremely well?

LEARNING AND GROWTH– To achieve our mission and vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve, and develop leaders among the Staff?



To adapt to the Association, two themes were further refined:

- Customer → Professional
- Internal Business → Business Excellence

Theme elements are outlined more specifically below:

Professional

- Membership value
- Membership recruitment and retention
- Quality of services
- Service delivery (access mechanisms, customer requirements, and image)

Financial

- Cost reduction
- Efficiency
- Revenue growth and mix
- Utilization of foundation as a resource

Business Excellence

- Business operations
- Customer management processes (support systems and use of technology)
- Innovation processes
- Regulatory and social processes (safety, environmental)

Learning & Growth

- Human capital (employee capabilities)
- Information capital (management of organizational knowledge)
- Organization capital (motivation, empowerment, alignment)

Strategic Plan Hierarchy

The plan included a hierarchy of elements that started with the most macro level of strategy and moved to a more micro level (moving from strategic to tactical). The starting point for any strategic planning process is the review of mission, vision, and values.

Subsequently, strategic themes and objectives were developed. The initiatives support the objectives, or how we work toward achieving the objectives and themes. After the development of themes and objectives, strategic initiatives were created. Each successive element of strategy more specifically detailed the premise of the four themes, as noted in the following:

Strategic Themes

The most macro level of strategic direction, following the four perspectives of customer (professional), financial, internal business support, and learning and growth. They are very broad-based approaches to strategic direction.

Strategic Objectives

Typically two to four objectives for each theme to create a framework for the parameters of strategic direction. Objectives support the themes. They answer the question, "What do we need to do to reach the strategic themes?" Objectives form the basis of key performance indicators.

Strategic Initiatives

Initiatives support the objectives and provide more detail about how the objectives will be achieved. They have an associated timeline and are categorized according to a short, medium, or long-term time frame.

Strategic Themes

In using the Balanced Scorecard, IPRA's Board, Staff and the Strategic Planning Team, developed strategic themes that are broad-brushed organizational descriptions that provide direction:



IPRA Strategy Map

The following illustrates the strategic themes and objectives that IPRA Board and Staff identified as priorities for the Strategic Plan.



Professional

Develop Members

- Provide relevant educational opportunities and resources
- Build relationships



Financial

Optimize Financial Strength

- Strength revenue streams
- Ensure fiscal responsibility and scalability



Business Excellence

Elevate Business Operations

- Commit to operational excellence
- Be mission focused



Learning & Growth



Cultivate a Culture of Development and Innovation

- Foster a risk tolerant environment
- Develop staff



Themes, Objectives, and Initiatives

The following further illustrates the themes, objectives, and initiatives for IPRA over the next five years. Initiatives are aligned with the strategic themes and objectives and initiatives provide greater specificity on how they will be implemented. Annual initiatives will be reviewed and

strategic tactics supporting the initiative will be detailed by the Staff involved in completing the initiative. The tactics are not included within the Strategic Plan, as the approach to completing each initiative should be developed at the time the work on the initiative has begun.

THEME	 Professional	Develop Members
OBJECTIVES	Provide relevant educational opportunities and resources	Build relationships
INITIATIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and promote educational pathways • Broaden educational opportunities for all members • Develop new member resources based on industry trends • Build relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide and enhance meaningful member networking opportunities • Strengthen IPRA relationship with its members • Formalize volunteer support
THEME	 Financial	Optimize Financial Strength
OBJECTIVES	Strength revenue streams	Ensure fiscal responsibility and scalability
INITIATIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage programs to increase non-dues revenue • Develop sponsor opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen impact of the Foundation • Review return on investment of current and future IPRA programs

Themes, Objectives, and Initiatives (cont.)

THEME	 Business Excellence	Elevate Business Operations
OBJECTIVES	Commit to operational excellence	Be mission focused
INITIATIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage technology to meet member needs • Develop and evolve communication strategies of IPRA program services • Continuously improve affiliate support • Strengthen committee and section functionality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate and provide offerings based on mission • Align staff, board, and volunteer with the IPRA mission • Strengthen relationship with sister organization (IAPD), partners, and affiliates • Advocate for the profession of parks, recreations and conservation
THEME	 Learning & Growth	Cultivate a Culture of Development and Innovation
OBJECTIVES	Foster a risk tolerant environment	Develop staff
INITIATIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize tools for staff to better serve members • Align staffing with association needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop well-defined culture • Develop a framework for innovation

Putting the Plan Into Action

To be successful, it's important to integrate the plan into daily operations. The Association will achieve its goals by deploying the following:

- **Use the Strategic Plan as a guidepost.** When decisions or responses to the membership are needed, the plan will serve as the reference point. It will be used to determine whether new issues or responses are of higher importance than what has been established in the plan.
- **Include the Strategic Plan in employee onboarding.**
- **Post the plan on the Association's website and track results.** This will assist in providing the membership with information about the Association's strategic direction and commitment to results.
- **Summarize the plan's progress in the annual report.**
- **Assign a staff member as a plan champion to monitor progress and integrate the plan into operations.**
- **Assign a leader to each strategic initiative and a team to work on completing the initiative.**
- **Regularly report on the plan's progress.** Break the plan into separate fiscal years, and report one year at a time as an ongoing annual work plan. Each initiative for the year should include a list of tactics that support its completion. The tactics are developed prior to each year for the upcoming list of initiatives and are created by the staff members involved in completing the initiative. Input each year's data in a spreadsheet that lists the themes, objectives, and initiatives, start and completion date, and the name of the staff person responsible for the initiative's completion.
- **Track the measures on a quarterly basis.** Provide an annual narrative about the results. Review the inventory of measures on an annual basis and adjust as necessary to help ensure the measures continuously add value to decision-making.
- **Conduct annual reviews.** At the end of the year, perform an annual review of the Strategic Plan and document any changes to initiatives. This process can be included at an annual review meeting in which successive years' initiatives are discussed as part of the annual budget process. Initiatives should tie into the budget process.
- **Develop measures of success for the initiative that supplement the Association's scorecard.** The Association's scorecard represents measures at the objective level, not the initiative level.
- **Work with the Foundation to help support the plan and provide additional opportunities for special projects, enhanced education opportunities and drawing professionals into the field.**
- **Align performance criteria with Association's values.** Performance appraisals should reflect the completion of the Strategic Plan initiatives as an evaluation criterion.
- **Track ideas for new strategies that arise and review them periodically to determine if they supplant any existing initiatives.**

Conclusion

This Strategic Plan exemplifies IPRA's unwavering commitment to Illinois park, recreation, and conservation professionals. It has been meticulously crafted through a thorough evaluation of the Association's current state, member needs, and opportunities and challenges for the industry.

IPRA envisions a future that is both ambitious and attainable. Through the steadfast execution of this Strategic Plan, the Association strives to cultivate innovation, enhance member value, and increase its impact. The unwavering dedication of the Association, its Board, and Staff will help to ensure this plan is achieved.



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