

3) What makes your agency “Outstanding” in its management of its resources and programs? Please cite 3 specific examples that capture the outstanding nature of your agency as you serve your unique community. Each example provided will be worth up to 3 points, for a total of 9 possible points. (Maximum Word Count for Each Example: 80)

Many say it but we prove it: our greatest resource is our diverse and innovative staff. The Workforce Development Unit was created to support our staff. This team centralizes training, professional development and emotional support for all staff. They developed a catalog of ongoing trainings, including conferences and workshops that enhance staff skills and knowledgebase, introducing them to higher levels of service and, ultimately, increasing their ability to meet the needs of Chicago citizens and visitors.

In addition to training, and in response to a growing need to support staff’s mental health, we expanded Workforce Development’s staff to include a Crisis Support Manager. Entirely unique to our organization, this person is a licensed clinical social worker, who provides clinical level support to staff when crises occur in parks and other serious situations. The Crisis Support Manager also provides ongoing trauma informed training and regular communications with staff.

Furthermore, our Workforce Development team coordinates quarterly Innovation Sessions with our leadership and management teams to proactively tackle the difficult issues we face. Each session provides space for open dialogue, idea sharing, collaboration, and brainstorming. Not only does this build stronger organizational relationships, these sessions also lead to transformative solutions, such as new customer service training for staff, a Diversity Policy, technology kiosks in parks, and emotional intelligence training.

4) Tell us your story about how your agency positively impacts the community you serve. Provide 5 actions or activities your agency has been involved with or undertaken in the past three years. Each example provided will be worth up to 2 points, for a total of 10 possible points. (Total Maximum Word Count for Each Example: 60)

Summer camp program fees remain flat while discounts have gone up to ensure all kids have access no matter their situation. Corporate donations through Send a Kid to Camp provide scholarships. The Summer Pass program provides 600 passes to religious organizations, school principals, and community groups to broaden our reach. More than 10,000 kids receive support each summer.

In the spirit of “serving those who have served,” all programs are free for active military personnel. Immediate family members receive a 10% discount on program fees. Recently, we changed our fitness programs to help active duty military prepare and pass their fitness requirements test. And several of our fitness and boot camp instructors are veterans.

As the largest direct employer of youth in Illinois, we employ over 3,000 youth as recreation leaders, lifeguards, and junior laborers. We host and provide over 50 apprenticeship programs for thousands of teens, preparing them for the workplace. Thousands of teens attend our Teen Opportunity Fairs to learn about, job readiness, college preparation, recreational and vocational workshops.

The parks are home to more than 200 concessionaires that provide unique dining, shopping and recreational opportunities. The concession management firm partnered with the Safer Foundation to develop an emerging concessions program for vendors from disadvantaged communities. The program provides additional recruitment and support for minority and woman owned businesses.

After evaluating our 15 Cultural Centers, upgrades began that will support expanded cultural programming and events in neighborhood parks. Projects will include improvements such as modernizing lighting and sound equipment, or renovating stages and rehearsal space. This enables the Cultural Centers to better serve our communities.

5) There are few resources more critical than public support, citizen involvement, and staff engagement. Please cite one outstanding or innovative example for each of these three characteristics. Each example will be worth up to 3 points, for a total of 9 possible points. (Total Maximum Word Count for Each Example: 100)

Public support – We provide volunteer opportunities for every interest and level of time-commitment from one-day options such as corporate or group projects, environmental stewardship days, and special event support to longer-term options such as coaching and sports instruction, conservatory support, tutoring/mentoring at after school programs and camps, community gardening, nature area monitoring and stewardship, and docent programs. Annually thousands of volunteer hours are logged across the city.

Citizen involvement – Over 230 parks are represented by their own Park Advisory Council, democratically elected and independent advocates for specific programs and capital projects. We support these organizations with an annual conference for members to learn about park initiatives and available resources. PACs actively support programming in parks, providing movies in the summer and activities for kids around holidays. PACs also solicit donations or other government funding for capital improvement projects.

Staff engagement – Our Workforce Development unit is implementing a districtwide Customer Service and Leadership initiative. This multi-year, phased process is based—in part—on the Disney Institute Customer Service training as well as staff and customer feedback. The first phase began with gathering feedback through an all employee survey and focus groups. This initiative also included deploying an internal steering committee to guide the program, and an all employee logo contest, to help build excitement around the program. All of our staff will

undergo training over the next two years in communication skills, service excellence and dealing with difficult situations.

6) Public entities have been increasingly called upon to demonstrate the results of their services and practices to decision-makers and the general public. Please cite 3 results, impacts, or outcomes you have measured and brief background about the outcome(s) and how the results were secured. Each example provided will be worth up to 3 points, for a total of 9 possible points. (Total Maximum Word Count for Each Example: 100)

Local universities assist with data analysis of our work. We engaged Northwestern University analytics master's students to review various revenue and cost structures. This included our pricing model for summer day camp, and our special events (weddings, music festivals, athletic events, etc.), to better understand strategic pricing decisions so we can maintain high customer satisfaction while developing dynamic pricing structures.

Through a strategic planning process for each of Chicago's 77 community areas, recreation needs were assessed. Over almost two years, managers, executives and staff met to examine each community's park programming, capital investments and challenges. After internal staff meetings, findings were reviewed with residents in each of the 77 communities to complete the development of a comprehensive hyper-local strategy for success, which led to program improvements and capital renovations.

A systematic review of tennis courts found discrepancies in use and condition. Since, we have restored tennis courts at 22 parks while converting 27 tennis courts in 10 parks to new uses including roller-hockey, multi-use play slabs and soccer mini-pitches. The popularity of the program attracted a partnership with the US Soccer Foundation and the Chicago Fire to convert 50 underused tennis courts into mini-pitches and program the courts to serve 21,500 youth participants by 2020.

7) Park and recreation agencies have long been known for creativity and innovation. One of the desirable outcomes of the Gold Medal program is to identify these efforts and approaches. Please cite and briefly explain 3 innovations implemented by your agency within the last 3 years. Each example provided will be worth up to 3 points, for a total of 9 possible points. (Total Maximum Word Count: 100)

We built an app using Microsoft Power Apps that allow landscape staff to track daily activities. The app uploads information to a cloud with reporting on when a location was visited, what tasks were done, how long staff was there, and what equipment was used. This allows for a centralized location of this information where we can pull what we need at a moment's notice without going through files of paperwork. It gives us a picture of what our work currently looks like and if we need or can adjust as the city and parks take on new initiatives.

The Success Center is an online learning management system available for all staff. Trainings include computer skills, new policies, sports and recreation activities, and personal

development. Managers can assign training to staff with dates for completion. This tool helps train our decentralized workforce on an ongoing basis. Other operational functions have moved to the cloud with information technology including our budget software, email system, and operational functions. Along with virtual private networks, this allows staff to continue working particularly in times of crisis like Covid 19.

Teens In the Park Fest provides the largest annual platform for Chicago's young artists to showcase their work and celebrate one another's talents. Over 3,000 teens attended each year's festival, held at a concert venue. Teens from across the city audition for spots to perform song, dance, rap, and spoken word alongside popular headlining artists. Attendees also connect to resources such as colleges, employment, and outlets for showcasing talent.

8) How has your agency addressed the NRPA Pillar of Social Equity in the last 3 years? (3 points) (Total Maximum Word Count: 120)

The teen-led Queering the Parks initiative brings youth and their families from across the city, who identify as LGBTQIA+, to collaborate and support safer public spaces by hosting inclusive events. Events include a Queer Family BBQ, Queer Pool Party, and the MasQUEERade Ball. The Ball reimagines the traditional homecoming experience to give queer youth the chance to be queens and kings and nonbinary royalty of their own.

Each event includes LGBTQIA+ training for staff and security, facilitated by the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance. Queering the Parks has also facilitated workshops on how to produce LGBTQIA+ centered youth programming. The initiative was developed with partners including Public Health Institute of Metro Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Chicago Public Library.

9) How has your agency addressed the NRPA Pillar of Health and Wellness in the last 3 years? (3 points) (Total Maximum Word Count: 120)

Camp Well program brings a wellness-focused curriculum to summer camp in communities dealing with violence, trauma, obesity, or other social inequalities. Following six weeks of nutrition education and structured play, program evaluation by Lurie Children's Hospital revealed increased awareness of healthy eating habits and an increased number of days per week in which attendees engaged in activity.

Specifically, 21% more of the 10-to-12-year-old attendees knew how many servings of fruits and vegetables should be consumed each day. Children in the selected parks participated in nearly 10 additional minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. Camp counselors showed a notable increase in their awareness of fruit, vegetable, water and low-fat dairy consumption, as well as reducing recreational screen time.

10) How has your agency addressed the NRPA Pillar of Conservation in the last 3 years? (3 points) (Total Maximum Word Count: 120)

The global change in recycling markets has reduced the amount of materials being repurposed. In response, we looked for other ways to reduce waste including composting. Our Summer Food Service Program serves approximately 1.2 million healthy meals annually at our summer day camps. We piloted lunch composting activities at 10 parks last summer, engaging our day campers to compost food and lunch boxes so as to increase the amount of materials being successfully composted. This program will be scaled up in 2020.

We create nature play spaces to reconnect children and nature. Through community led efforts, and using materials from landscape operations to keep costs down, we have built nine and have eight others in development.

11) What challenges has your community and/or agency experienced over the past 3 years and what steps or actions has your agency taken to resolve these challenges? Cite the agency's role with the challenge, types of actions/steps taken, and effectiveness of approach. (3 points) (Total Maximum Word Count 210)

Chicago is next to one of the world's most valuable resources: Lake Michigan. And yet water is a challenge—from use, to management, to conservation—but also an opportunity for our comprehensive water approach.

More intense summer storms challenge our green infrastructure. From permeable paving, bio-swales, detention ponds, or disconnecting downspouts, our comprehensive approach addresses unique challenges in each park. In 2017, we installed a 250,000-gallon retention system under a resurfaced parking lot. We recently installed groundwater infiltration systems under several ball fields to ensure stormwater does not affect playability.

As manager of 27 miles of lakefront, water is often on our minds. We have pioneered a rapid water testing process at all beaches which provides real time water quality data through onsite beach notification and online. Through public education, we inform beach users of their impact to the environment and water.

In response to high lake water levels and increased interest in water recreation, we offered 11 drop-in water safety trainings at beaches and lake-adjacent park facilities, including one that was streamed live on our Facebook page. We also increased public communication about water safety issues through improvements in flag notification and signage at all facilities and on our website.