

## **NRPA Gold Medal Application**

### **1. Outstanding Nature of Agency**

**What makes your agency “outstanding”? 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. (Total Maximum Word Count: 180)**

#### **Building on Burnham**

Architect Daniel Burnham inspired our “Building on Burnham” initiative which invests in our Lakefront, the Chicago River, natural areas and recreational opportunities in neighborhoods across the city. By aggressively seeking out additional dollars, capital funds are matched with government grants and philanthropic dollars, doubling funding for investments. With these partnerships, we built new artificial turf fields, fieldhouses and playgrounds, and made improvements to historic facilities, baseball fields, wildlife habitats and our renowned lakefront trail.

#### **Park Access**

Our 2016 Land Acquisition Plan highlights the open accessibility methodology, to ensure Chicagoans live within a 1/2-mile or ten-minute walk of a park and the per capita methodology utilizing a standard based upon population densities within Chicago’s 77 communities. Since 2016, we’ve added over 117 acres, expanded 11 parks, and added 20 new parks, resulting in 99.7% of Chicagoans within a ten-minute walk from a park.

#### **Record Program Enrollment**

Infrastructure investments and new parkland have expanded programming opportunities. We had record program enrollments in 2018, with 411,000 direct enrollments and 416,000 enrollments through indirect partner programs.

### **2. Impact Upon Community**

**Tell us your story about how your agency positively impacts the community you serve. Share with us 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: 200)**

#### **Youth Employment**

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.

#### **Elementary School Sports**

With the Chicago Public Schools, SCORE! (Sports Can Open Roads to Excellence) increases opportunities for elementary sports participation in over 400 schools with competitions on Saturdays in neighborhood parks. SCORE! features a no-cut policy, after school practices, and guaranteed playing time.

### **Track and Field**

After decades of community advocacy, the \$56M Gately Indoor Track and Field is under construction. As the only hydraulically banked indoor track in the region, Gately will revitalize Chicago's legacy in the sport of track and field.

### **Wi-Fi Access**

In 2016, only 26 of our parks offered Wi-Fi. Now, 128 parks provide quality Wi-Fi. Dozens of other park locations will get Wi-Fi this summer, ensuring equitable access to Wi-Fi citywide.

### **Park Advisory Councils**

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.

## **3. Use of Valuable Resources**

**There are few resources more critical than public support, citizen involvement, and staff engagement. Please identify one outstanding or innovative example for each of these three characteristics. Each example provided will be worth up to 3 points, for a total of 9 possible points. (Total Maximum Word Count: 210)**

**Public Support** – Each summer, approximately 40,000 youth and teens participate in camps with the average summer day camp fee of \$250. We launched Send a Kid to Camp to support the fund that provides financial assistance to youth and teens in need, eliminating financial barriers to participation. To date, almost 200 individuals and 4 corporations have donated more than \$40,000, assisting over three hundred kids.

**Citizen involvement** – In 2016, we initiated an ambitious strategic planning session for each of Chicago's 77 community areas to assess community needs. Over almost two years, managers, executives and staff met to examine each community's park programming, capital investments and challenges. After internal staff meetings, our 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.

**Staff Engagement** – 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, and technology kiosks in parks.

#### **4. Demonstration of Results**

**Public entities have been increasingly called upon to demonstrate the results of their services and practices to decision-makers and the general public. Please share with us 3 results, impacts, or outcomes you have measured and brief background about the benefit 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: 210)**

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.

In 2016, our 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.

Beginning in 2016, our Camp Well program brings a wellness-focused curriculum to communities dealing with violence, trauma, obesity, low food access, or other social inequalities. Following six weeks of nutrition education and structured play, program evaluation showed positive impact on both campers and staff. Data collected with Lurie Children's Hospital revealed increased awareness healthy eating habits and an increase in the number of days per week in which attendees engaged in activity.

#### **5. Innovations**

**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 valuable efforts and approaches. Please identify 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: 240)**

Re:Center is our creative place making initiative driven by local residents anchored in Chicago's neighborhoods. From 2015-2020, our fifteen Cultural Centers are collaborating with communities to re-imagine cultural priorities and programs that address their specific interests. Each year, three Cultural Centers are activated with the Re:Center process consisting of listening parties, a year with an artist in residence and the development of a cultural committee. Last year, a community turned a space that was a target of graffiti into art. The project instilled ownership in residents which led to annual back to school fest at the wall.

Started in 2015, 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.

Emerald ash borer, an invasive beetle, has been killing our ash trees. Instead of just removing them, trees are repurposed into board wood for construction projects using a mobile sawmill. Local artists have also turned dead trees into artwork, by painting, carving, wrapping trees and hanging art in them. To date, 37 trees in parks across the city have been repurposed into artwork while dozens have been repurposed for wood.

## **6. Social Equity**

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

We recognized a need to increase opportunities for girls' access to recreation, women's health, and leadership in sports. Our Girls in Sports "Day of Play" empowers girls' participation in sports and physical activity. Typically, over 1,100 girls participate. Last year, the Girls' Sports Summit gathered 100 recreation professionals to address scenarios regarding equity, obstacles facing girls, stereotypes and programming. This year, the Girls' Sports Summit will host 250 girls ages 11-14, with activities promoting self-resilience, wellness and healthy eating.

Our 'Go Series began in 2016 offering free running, skateboarding and basketball programs citywide, bringing events to underserved areas. 'Go Run provides free timed runs, 'Go Grind offers skateboarding/BMX events and clinics, and 'Go Hoops provides pop-up basketball tournaments.

## **7. Health and Wellness**

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

According to a 2018 NPRA report, 1 in 5 kids come to parks hungry. Our Summer Food Service Program serves approximately 1.2 million healthy meals annually at our summer day camps. Our Child and Adult Care Food Program grew from 17 sites in 2017 to 50 sites last year, serving 234,000 meals during after-school programs. We've also added 3 park locations to serve meals to anyone under 18 years old regardless of program involvement.

Many of these programs, as part of our Wellness Policy, provide nutrition education and physical activity. For example, our Fun with Food curriculum provides kids with hands-on learning through taste testing, food preparation and menu development. Harvest Gardens allow kids to grow the produce they eat.

## **8. Conservation**

**In what ways has your agency addressed the NRPA Pillar of Conservation in the last 3 years? (3 points) (Total Maximum Word Count: 120)**

In 2016, we set a goal of 2,020 acres of natural habitat by the year 2020. Since then, we have added 450 acres of natural habitat for a total of 1,850 acres in 90 parks across the city.

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.

Big Marsh Park marries 230 acres of habitat restoration with active eco-recreation – a 40-acre dirt bike park, cyclocross, BMX, trails, and camping activities. In a nod to the rust belt, an iron ore shipping wall at Steelworkers Park has been transformed into an outdoor rock climbing feature.

## **9. Challenges**

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

We live 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.

As an older Midwestern city, old infrastructure challenges our resources. Since 2016 we routinely test each of our 1,500 water fountains for lead, going above and beyond the federal

testing standards to ensure the highest water quality. As we move towards our goal of operating a lead free system we are replacing water supply infrastructure in high traffic areas and eliminating underutilized fountains in others.

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.