



SESSIONS

Thursday, January 23, 2025

14

Engaging the New Collar Worker

Topic Track: Leadership/Management

Location: Regency Ballroom B, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Bob Johnson, Deputy Director, Oak Brook Park District; Jake Stachowiak, Superintendent of Parks, Oak Brook Park District

The modern workforce is changing, and the lines between traditional "blue" and "white" collar employees are shifting. As organizations struggle to fill roles with high-quality staff, it may be time to re-evaluate the talent pool. Both the private and public sector has long required staff in management and leadership roles to hold a four-year degree, but the emergence of the "new collar employee", those skilled individuals with aptitude to learn quickly and perform at a high level, should not be overlooked. New collar candidates may not possess an academic degree, but their abilities may be just what your agency needs to develop talented leaders.

Learning Objectives:

- What is a new collar worker and what can they do for your organization?
- How to identify a new collar candidate and develop them into impactful leaders in your organization.
- How can new collar candidates position themselves for advancement into management and leadership roles?



SESSIONS

112

Real Estate 101: What You Need to Know About Acquiring, Selling, and Using Property

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

Location: Gold Coast, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Scott Puma, Attorney, Ancel Glink; David Silverman, Attorney, Ancel Glink

This session will focus on all aspects of real estate. We will discuss acquiring real estate and the ways to sell it. We will also discuss lesser interests in real estate such as easements, licenses and use agreements and key provisions to include in each of them. We will also talk about the use of park property, including zoning issues, that your agency may face and how to resolve them. Additionally, we will discuss developer donations, or impact fees, and how to maximize them for the benefit of your agency.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the ways to acquire and sell real estate.
- Understand the common zoning issues that may be faced.
- Know how to resolve property questions as they arise.



SESSIONS

114

Esports Ecosystem

Topic Track: Recreation

Location: Regency Ballroom A, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Richard Suarez, Managing Director, Stay Plugged In

Purpose of the session is to show how expanding Esports and STEM programming can help attract and retain students/participants. We will discuss how building out an Esports and STEM lab can create a space that can be used as a gaming room but also a tech space where students can learn a bout aviation or cybersecurity through games they are already playing.

Learning Objectives:

- Structure programming and leagues that will increase participation at Parks and Rec while generating interest in STEM programming for students passionate about gaming.
- See how Esports can increase engagement and community by creating a welcoming and engaging space for students to gather and compete with friends.



SESSIONS

126

Addressing Employee Mental Health Conditions

Topic Track: HR/Risk Management

Location: Regency Ballroom D, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Kevin Noll, Attorney, Robbins Schwartz; Aaron Kacel, Attorney, Robbins Schwartz

Properly addressing employee mental health conditions can be a delicate process. This presentation will provide information on the prevalence of mental health issues in the workplace and strategies for addressing these issues under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Learning Objectives:

- Understanding the employer's response obligations for addressing mental health conditions in the workplace.
- Learning how to properly assess requests for leaves of absences for mental health conditions to ensure legal compliance under the FMLA and ADA.
- Identifying common pitfalls related to an employer's response to employees' mental health conditions.



SESSIONS

319

Innovate and Automate: Creating Custom Apps and Automations for your Organization

Topic Track: Finance/Information Technology

Location: Crystal Ballroom B, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Adam Carlson, Assistant Manager of Ranger Operations, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County; Jacob Vegter, Senior Ranger, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Explore our journey from paper to innovative workflows using Power Apps, Power Automate, SharePoint, and Teams. Learn how we developed efficient, scalable, and accessible solutions without extensive IT experience. Our focus will be on developing low-code solutions that utilize an agency's existing data and Microsoft services, in addition to practical examples of solutions deployed for real-time field reporting and task management, and the automations to connect and communicate that information. Participants will leave with new ideas and practical knowledge to drive innovation at their agency.

Learning Objectives:

- Explore Case Studies and Real-World Applications.
- Foster Innovation and Agency Self-Sufficiency.



SESSIONS

411

Art Without Boundaries: Identifying and Overcoming Barriers in Cultural Arts Programming

Topic Track: Recreation

Location: Water Tower, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Laney Haupert, Cultural Arts Manager, Palatine Park District; Lindsey Pollina, Dance and Theatre Program Manager, Bolingbrook Park District

In today's changing world, cultural arts plays a key role in helping develop individuality and inclusivity. It connects us to each other, our world, and ourselves. The role of the park district and the program supervisor in creating and sustaining these programs can be challenging. In this session, we will identify the major barriers in bringing quality cultural arts programming to your park district and community at large, as well as solutions and resources to help you overcome these obstacles. We will dig into creative resource management, strategies for engaging staff and participants, as well as methods of navigating and promoting inclusive programming that best meets your community's needs. Join us and learn how to bring quality cultural arts programming to your community in an impactful and meaningful way.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify barriers in creating a cultural arts program and cultural arts program management, including staffing, space, time, and money.
- Learn creative solutions to common barriers in the creation and management of a cultural arts program.
- Attendees will be provided a list of a variety of resources to assist in their program creation and management.



SESSIONS

604

When Soft Surface Becomes Too Hard – Challenges in Maintenance, Repairs, and Replacement of Soft Surface Playground Systems

Topic Track: Facilities

Location: Toronto, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom, Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Marek Stankowski, Facility Manager, Chicago Park District; Dan Reamer, Facility Manager, Chicago Park District

Soft Surface Playground Systems have been around for about 40 years. Even though the product has improved over the years, the proper maintenance of this system comes with many challenges. The rubber material is susceptible to temperature change where it expands and contracts, but it can also shrink over the years. Other issues are the age of the surface, brittleness, drainage issues, roots lifting the system, and curb separation. Each agency is responsible for the safe operation of each playground system. With constant budget constraints, agencies are looking for different ways to extend the life and avoid a quite costly expenditure. Routine preventative maintenance helps to extend the life of the system, but sometimes repairs and replacement is necessary. Decisions which way to proceed are impacted by an agency's available budget, quality materials, and specialized workforce. to complete this task. This session will discuss many factors that affect the decision-making process.

Learning Objectives:

- Proper maintenance of soft surface system.
- How to efficiently repair and extend the life of the soft surface system.
- When to throw in the towel and replace the system completely.



SESSIONS

902

Parks and Recreation Marketing with AI

Topic Track: Marketing/Communications

Location: Regency Ballroom C, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Jason Peters, President, GovTech Innovators, Inc.; Sam Lunt, Artificial Intelligence Consultant, GovTech Innovators, Inc.

Unlock the potential of Artificial Intelligence in your Parks and Recreation marketing with our AI training course. Dive deep into Large Language Models (LLMs), explore cutting-edge AI tools, and master AI-driven marketing techniques to transform your community engagement and marketing strategies.

Learning Objectives:

- **Enhanced Marketing Skills:** Learn how to efficiently create and distribute engaging content that resonates with your community.
- **Efficiency:** Utilize AI to streamline marketing content creation and make data-driven decisions.
- **Innovation in Service Delivery:** Implement AI tools to enhance user experiences and community interaction.



SESSIONS

1011

Improving Operations through Intersectionality and Systems Change

Topic Track: Diversity

Location: Crystal Ballroom A, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Amanda Grant, Data Manager, Forest Preserves of Cook County; Raquel Garcia-Alvarez, Policy Manager, Forest Preserves of Cook County

Acknowledging and embracing intersectionality can improve all aspects of organizational development, including sustainability, nightscapes, training and development, accessible programming and communication. Learn how simple yet thoughtful changes can have a huge impact internally and externally by creating progressive practices to move your organization forward. Sustainability is not just about environmental issues; it also encompasses social and economic dimensions. By applying an intersectional approach, organizations can better understand and respond to the diverse needs and perspectives of staff and the public. Come and learn about the different sustainability strategies concerning dark skies, building accessibility, facilities, and green teams.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn how to apply an intersectionality lens to sustainability, policies and programming.
- Discuss how social and economic concerns factor into sustainability planning and practices.
- Identify strategies to enhance community involvement in short- and long-term planning for better outcomes.



SESSIONS

1104

Harnessing Passion and Collaboration: Elevating Community Engagement and Education to New Heights through Social Media

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

Location: Crystal Ballroom C, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Anamari Dorgan, Director of Community Engagement, Forest Preserve District DuPage County; Jonathan Mullen, Multimedia Content Specialist, Forest Preserve District DuPage County; Ashley Chex, Digital Communications Specialist, Forest Preserve District DuPage County; Rianna Schwartz, Preserve Project Designer, Forest Preserve District DuPage County; Jennifer Rydzewski, Ecologist, Forest Preserve District DuPage County

In the dynamic landscape of social media, the convergence of passion, expertise, and creativity can result in powerful collaboration to transform engagement and public education from ordinary to extraordinary. This session explores how forest preserve districts, conservation agencies, and park districts can effectively leverage social media platforms to share information, enhance learning, and meaningfully engage with the communities they serve. A case-study will be presented and delve into a real-world example of a viral series created by The Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. Presenters will share the ways individuals from multiple departments and disciplines came together to harness their intrinsic passions, technical and creative skills, and content knowledge to develop compelling, fun, and educational social media content that benefitted residents and increased awareness of the District's mission. By the end of this session, attendees will have a deeper understanding of how to leverage their own cross-departmental skills and passions, and will leave equipped with actionable strategies, inspiring examples, and practical tools to implement in their own social media endeavors.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain insight into building authentic internal connections that can foster community engagement.
- Discover practical strategies to understand your audience and sustain momentum through social media platforms.
- Understand the balance of risk and reward to drive meaningful public interactions that amplify your social media presence.



SESSIONS

109

Recognizing Substance Use and How Recovery Connects to Parks and Recreation

Topic Track: HR/Risk Management

Location: Gold Coast, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Gerald Lott, Executive Director, Sauk Valley Voices of Recovery

Join Gerald Lott, a national leader in SUD Recovery and Peer Support and founder of a regional recovery community organization in northern Illinois, for a look at how substance use disorders impact public recreation spaces. How to recognize use and what to do to replace the negative use of spaces with safe and encouraging activities and programming. We will discuss options for bringing harm reduction services, awareness campaigns and sober activities to create inclusiveness and safety for families and those in recovery.

Learning Objectives:

- What are the tell-tale signs of illegal drug/alcohol use in public spaces?
- Program options to deflect users and help them find services and reduce harm.
- Strategies to build a robust and inviting recovery community through group activities.



SESSIONS

113

Unified Actions: Managing Protest Scenarios through Municipal Intergovernmental Cooperation

Topic Track: Leadership/Management

Location: Water Tower, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Chris Leiner, Executive Director, Northbrook Park District; Cara Pavlicek, Village Manager, Village of Northbrook

Attendees will hear a case study on how two local government units successfully collaborated to provide a coordinated response, ensuring community safety and the protection of First Amendment rights during a protest.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain an understanding of the value of intergovernmental agreements and cooperation.
- Determine suitable community communication.
- Implement a plan based on known information.



SESSIONS

120

Can We and Should We Have Video Surveillance in Parks and Facilities?

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

Location: Crystal Ballroom C, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Megan Mack, Partner, Ancel Glink, PC; Tyler Smith, Attorney, Ancel Glink, PC

Video surveillance cameras are everywhere. What policies and procedures do park districts need to have in place before they start recording in parks and facilities? You will learn the best practices for utilizing video surveillance systems, the implications of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Local Records Act. We will provide updates on recent case law related to the use of video surveillance.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the potential benefits and legal implications of using video surveillance.
- Understand the need for policies governing the use of video surveillance in your parks and facilities.
- Learn best practices for implementing a video surveillance system in parks and facilities.



SESSIONS

204

Grant Update for 2025

Topic Track: Parks/Natural Resources

Location: Regency Ballroom A, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Michelle Kelly, Principal Landscape Architect, Upland Design Ltd; Patrick Davis, Office of Grants Management and Accountability, Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Meet with Illinois Department of Natural Resources grant expert, Patrick Davis, and Upland Design's grant writer, Michelle Kelly, to hear the latest on State of Illinois capital grants that fund park and recreation projects. The two will review recent grant changes, budgets and key elements of grants. You learn to avoid the most common problems with grant submissions, and tips for writing a great grant application. Finally, a question-and-answer session will allow attendees to get their most pressing questions answered.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the 2025 grant outlook.
- Assign your capital projects to the right grant program.
- Learn key elements for a successful grant submission.



SESSIONS

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Microsoft's AI Vision

Topic Track: Finance/Information Technology

Location: Regency Ballroom C, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Drew Poggemann, Director of Solution Architecture, Heartland Business Systems;
Max Lacy, AI Engineer, Heartland Business System

Microsoft is infusing AI throughout their products to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. AI is having transformational impacts from front-line team members to executive management, from productivity tools to business applications and more all while focusing on responsible and secure AI solutions. We will walk through Microsoft's strategy and some of the great wins being achieved in the workplace to help you see the art of the possible in your own organizations.

Learning Objectives:

- How Microsoft is using AI to help increase productivity in the work place - AI today.
- AI adoption strategies.
- Microsofts AI plans for the future.



SESSIONS

403

Teens: Too Old for Camp, Too Young for Counselor. What to Do with Them?

Topic Track: Recreation

Location: Crystal Ballroom A, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Joe Lilly, Program Manager, Park District of Oak Park; Abby Meachum, Program Supervisor, Park District of Oak Park; Abby Sacks, Program Supervisor, Park District of Oak Park

Are you looking to bridge the gap between teenage campers and seasonal staff at your summer camp? Look no further than programs like Counselor in Training (CIT) and Junior Lifeguards! Learn how to initiate, sustain, and leverage these initiatives to cultivate leadership skills and foster personal growth in participating teens. Invest in CIT and Junior Lifeguard programs to enrich the lives of teens, cultivate dedicated staff members, and revitalize your organization's recruitment pipeline. Join us on a journey of growth, empowerment, and endless possibilities with summer teen stepping stone programs!

Learning Objectives:

- How to implement a teen based summer program such as CIT or Jr. Lifeguard and its benefits.
- How to leverage programs like these into creating future staffing pools.
- Develop training geared towards engaging teens in a summer camp/pool environment in a leadership role.



SESSIONS

418

Summer Camps: What are the People and the Data Saying in a Post-Pandemic World?

Topic Track: Recreation

Location: Crystal Ballroom B, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Colette Marquardt, CEO, American Camp Association, Illinois; Sandra Thompson, Recreation Supervisor, Crystal Lake Park District

Summer camps, especially day camps, in Illinois, are essential to our state's community. The landscape of summer camp was changing before 2020 and much has changed since. But what does it look like now heading into 2025?

Jump into a data-rich session that will weave together research studies, surveys, and "from the field" trends on the economic impact, staffing, quality improvement, and more. Explore lessons learned from the ACA Crisis Hotline and areas to be aware of for risk management. Gain an understanding of where the field is going and what to be aware of in future planning.

Be prepared to walk away with concrete data points to help you form decisions and strategy while serving your community through summer camp!

Learning Objectives:

- Obtain data on economic, youth, and overall impact of camp on the greater community.
- Develop a foundation of data points and knowledge to make strategic decisions.
- Understand areas of increased risk and trends around safety at summer camp.



SESSIONS

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21 Secrets to Master F&B Sales & Profits

Topic Track: Facilities

Location: Regency Ballroom D, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Michael Holtzman, President, CEO and Founder, Holtzman Group Hospitality Experts

Whether your park district is revamping old food and beverage programming or adding new food concepts, this session is for you. Delve into the 21 Secrets to Master F&B Sales & Profits and gain the ability to generate millions in cost recovery. Attendees of this session will master the fundamentals of serving fresh, delicious food and beverage products. During this session, learn the proper setup of a successful food and beverage concept. Gain an understanding of menu engineering and learn how menu drives design. Explore how to improve customer service, how to reduce wait times for park guests, and more during this invaluable session.

Learning Objectives:

- Be able to identify the proper setup of a successful food and beverage concept.
- Learn basic menu engineering.
- Discover how to reduce wait times for your park guests.



SESSIONS

901

True Life: Sponsors Tell All

Topic Track: Marketing/Communications

Location: Regency Ballroom B, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Stacey Fontechia, Sales and Sponsorship Manager, Naperville Park District; Mike Bakker, Owner, Dutchman Heating and Cooling, Inc.; Alex Anderson, Owner, Oswald's Pharmacy; Jodi Bernicky, Partnerships, Naperville Jaycees Last Fling

In this panel discussion, hear from 3 Naperville Park District sponsors on what's important in implementing partnerships, how businesses spend their marketing dollars, activating sponsorships for community engagement, and discussions on in-kind and when it makes sense for your organization.

Learning Objectives:

- What's most important to sponsors/businesses when it comes to creating partnerships within the community.
- How businesses focus their marketing and advertising dollars and activate with advertising and community engagement.
- When in-kind advertising and sponsorships make sense to implement for your district.



SESSIONS

1103

Balancing Environmental and Historic Preservation Goals at Fullersburg Forest Preserve

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

Location: Toronto, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom, Level

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Tim Pollowy, Sr. Landscape Architect, Hey and Associates, Inc.; Deanna Doohaluk, Watershed Project Manager, The Conservation Foundation

Fullersburg Woods Forest Preserve, located in Oak Brook, DuPage County, Illinois is home to the historic Graue Mill, a popular restored grist mill from the 1800's that is on the National Register of Historic Places. The site is also characterized by high quality restored woodland habitat, Salt Creek, and until recently a run of the river dam constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's adjacent to the mill. The impoundment above the dam had the poorest water quality as measured by dissolved oxygen anywhere on Salt Creek. Working together, the DuPage River Salt Creek Work Group and Forest Preserve District of DuPage County desired to remove the dam and restore approximately one and a half miles of riverine habitat and associated wetlands at Fullersburg Forest Preserve to meet IEPA water quality goals. After addressing historic preservation concerns, the project was approved by regulatory authorities having jurisdiction including the US Army Corps of Engineers, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Historic Preservation Office, and others. Removal of the dam was completed in late 2023. During 2024, river and wetland restoration, construction of visitor amenities, and historic mitigation measures commenced. This presentation will explain the public and regulatory process the project went through, and how both environmental and historic preservation goals were met at Fullersburg Forest Preserve.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the regulatory process involved when an environmental project impacts historic resources.
- Understand mitigation options for impacts to historic resources.
- Understand the negative impact dams have on streams and rivers.



SESSIONS

101

Lessons From the Ballot Box

Topic Track: Leadership/Management

Location: Water Tower, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Jeff Andreasen, President, aQity Research & Insights, Inc.; Anjali Vij, Partner, Chapman and Cutler LLP; Aaron Gold, Vice President, Speer Financial, Inc.; Jackie Rachev, Account Supervisor, PCI, Inc.

Starting with the right preparation and planning, the passage of a referendum should almost be inevitable, not left to crossed fingers and high hopes. With lessons, steps and insights from experts in research, financing, election law and communications, you can confidently lead your Board of Commissioners and staff in a community engagement and education campaign in support of a ballot initiative to issue bonds or increase the limiting rate.

Learning Objectives:

- When to start planning and how (research, bonds vs. limiting rate, scope, which election, decision/filing deadlines).
- Keys to successful referenda and the pitfalls to avoid.
- Timelines and checklists for the next election cycle(s).



SESSIONS

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Social Media & The Law: Facebook? Instagram? X?

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

Location: Regency Ballroom A, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Julie Tappendorf, Equity Partner, Ancel Glink, PC

In this session, Attorney Julie Tappendorf will update park district officials and employees about recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions on the First Amendment and government social media activities. Julie will discuss best practices for moderating your social media sites, and what types of comments are protected speech and should not be removed or hidden. Julie will provide guidance on copyright laws and the pros and cons of using Artificial Intelligence in social media. Finally, she will provide tips for crafting a social media policy that is legally defensible.

Learning Objectives:

- Discuss new Supreme Court decisions on the First Amendment and government social media.
- Learn about best practices for moderating comments on government social media sites.
- Hear tips for creating a social media policy that is defensible.



SESSIONS

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2025 Employment Law Update

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

Location: Comiskey, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Darcy Proctor, Partner, Tressler LLP; Drew O'Donnell, Associate, Tressler LLP

This session will cover recent developments in employment law impacting Illinois employers and discuss best practices for avoiding liability and employment related lawsuits.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify common workplace issues that lead to employment litigation and potential employer liability.
- Minimize liability exposure and mitigate risk associated with employment decisions and practices.
- Analysis and impact of recent court opinions on public sector employment practices.



SESSIONS

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Large Event, Festival and Parade Security

Topic Track: HR/Risk Management

Location: Gold Coast, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Derke Price, Attorney, Ancel Glink; Chief Steven Schindlbeck, Chief of Park District Police, Naperville Park District

Large Events, Festivals and Parades all present unique safety and security challenges for Staff, Participants and the Public. This session draws on lessons learned in both successful events and from tragedies so that your agency and staff are prepared and can deliver the best experience possible.

Learning Objectives:

- Best practices for planning and preparing for these events.
- How to manage intergovernmental cooperation.
- How to manage the expenses for such events.



SESSIONS

203

The Journey from Parks to Executive Director

Topic Track: Parks/Natural Resources

Location: Michigan ABC, East Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Carrie Fullerton, Executive Director, Arlington Heights Park District; Jenny Knitter, Executive Director, Woodridge Park District; Benjamin Rea, Executive Director, Palatine Park District

Are you considering making the transition from a Parks leadership position to Executive Director? Attend this interactive session to learn some strategies to prepare for that transition from a seasoned Executive Director and two other professionals who came from Parks leadership positions to Executive Director roles within the last year.

Learning Objectives:

- Outline a course of action to prepare themselves to be a candidate for an Executive Director position through a combination of educational courses,
- certifications, and hands-on experience.
- Prepare for real world scenarios that occur as an Executive Director from the experiences of all three panelists.



SESSIONS

304

Beyond the Noise: AI in Parks and Recreation

Topic Track: Finance/Information Technology

Location: Regency Ballroom C, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): KJ Shah, Co-Founder & COO, Kaizen Labs

Artificial intelligence — what emerged as one of the hottest trends in 2023 is clearly here to stay. AI undoubtedly has promising use cases but can often feel overwhelming, as most discussions are full of buzzwords like LLM, GPT, machine learning, and NLP. What is artificial intelligence and how will it affect parks & recreation? What are some practical use cases for artificial intelligence that are responsible and user-friendly? How will AI influence how residents discover, interact with, and complete reservations/registrations across parks & recreation offerings? How do I, as a parks & recreation professional, keep up with emerging trends? What are some of the challenges and ethical considerations I should think about related to adopting AI solutions in my department?

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize how AI is impacting Parks & Recreation for both staff and residents across customer service, marketing, programming, and facilities.
- Formulate responsible and user-friendly use cases for AI that staff can consider implementing to drive productivity.
- Assess the challenges and ethical implications related to adopting AI solutions in Parks & Recreation.



SESSIONS

406

Volunteer Coaches: Attracting, Training, and Retaining the Heart of Your Sports Leagues

Topic Track: Recreation

Location: Crystal Ballroom B, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Cameron Edelman, Athletic Manager, Arlington Heights Park District

Join us for an informative and engaging session on how to attract, train, and retain volunteer coaches, who are the backbone of any successful sports league. This session is designed to equip you with the knowledge and tools needed to build a strong and dedicated team of volunteer coaches. We will delve into specific techniques for identifying and reaching out to potential volunteers, best practices for onboarding and training that ensure coaches are well-prepared and confident in their roles, and strategies to keep them excited to return year after year.

Learning Objectives:

- Effective Volunteer Recruitment Techniques -How to identify and target potential volunteer coaches using proven outreach strategies.
- Onboarding and Training Best Practices and Ideas - Ideas for developing and implementing onboarding and training processes making coaches feel valued.
- Retention and Engagement Strategies - Discover methods to maintain high levels of engagement and satisfaction among volunteer coaches.



SESSIONS

505

How to Have Difficult Conversations and How to Mentor and Guide Others (part time staff) Through the Process

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

Location: Crystal Ballroom C, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Michelle Smith, Speaker, Coach & Consultant, Z&B Consulting, Inc.

Michelle Smith of Z&B Consulting, Inc. comes into organizations to provide interactive training & coaching for staff & volunteers. She's spent decades helping organizations get better results for those they serve & knows firsthand how important it is to have the difficult conversations others would prefer to ignore. During this session, Michelle will share steps to take when having difficult conversations, as well as for mentoring and guiding part-time staff through the process. She'll also share real life examples of difficult conversations she's had through the years. You'll leave with ideas you can immediately put into action and staff and clients having better experiences.

After years of serving her community while pushing aside herself & her family, Michelle was burned out. She quickly learned the importance of bringing fun into everyday tasks & working smarter, not harder. It's now her mission to help others who love to serve do the same. Michelle is the Rotary District 6450 Membership Engagement Chair, Past President of the Romeoville Rotary & Romeoville HS Choir Boosters, on the executive board of the Romeoville Chamber & on the Parish council at her church. Michelle is also the Community Engagement Director for DuCAP, a non profit that works to ignite meaningful partnerships and activities for teens so they can make a positive impact in their communities.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the importance of having difficult conversations and dispel common myths.
- Steps to take when having difficult conversations.
- Steps to mentor & guide part-time staff through the process of having difficult conversations.



SESSIONS

601

Aquatics Roundtable

Topic Track: Facilities

Location: Regency Ballroom D, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Katie Dunn, Aquatics Manager, Elk Grove Park District; Viktoria Orosz, Aquatics Programs Manager, Fox Valley Park District

Located within IPRA's Facility Management (FM) Section, the Aquatic Committee consists of a group of park district professionals that either specialize or work in and around Aquatic Facilities. At this meeting, we will do a Roundtable. Come with any questions you have for the group! If you are interested in joining the committee or simply wish to attend for educational and networking purposes, we encourage you to attend.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be able to crowdsource ideas from colleagues in the industry.
- Participants will share ideas from their own programs and facilities to help others.
- Participants will network with other Aquatics professionals from around the state.



SESSIONS

910

Build a Better Board Report: Communicating Your Digital Marketing Success to Your Board

Topic Track: Marketing/Communications

Location: Regency Ballroom B, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Monica Weigel, Marketing & Digital Communication Manager, Fox Valley Park District; Katie Garrett, Assistant Director of Marketing, Fox Valley Park District

In an ever-changing digital marketing industry with an abundance of data, communicating your digital marketing success and initiatives to your board in a meaningful way is no easy feat. By taking a templated approach that focuses on the most impactful metrics, you can make a visually engaging and educational analytics report that showcases your team's work and helps you identify opportunities to improve. Walk through the process of putting together a monthly marketing analytics board report that incorporates data visualization and storytelling to bring the numbers to life. Leave with concrete examples and strategies for communicating the value of your marketing efforts to marketers and non-marketers alike.

Learning Objectives:

- Leave with ideas on how to create your own templated approach to efficiently communicate digital analytics to your board.
- Discover the value of data visualization and storytelling to communicate digital marketing analytics in a digestible and accessible format.
- Identify the most important metrics to showcase marketing wins to key stakeholders.



SESSIONS

1003

Bridging Communities: Empowering Diversity through Parks & Recreation

Topic Track: Diversity

Location: Crystal Ballroom A, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Jessica Soto, Assistant Director of Recreation, Park District of Highland Park

Through our Park District Values and our DEIA efforts; the Park District of Highland Park has created programming and services to involve our neighboring Hispanic and Spanish-speaking community members. Learn how we started from nothing but a leap of faith to an IPRA Special Event of the Year Award. Learn what resources are available, who your best organizational allies are, and what type of events you can create that will make any community member feel like this is where they belong.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn what types of organizations and resources to collaborate with to help support your initiative.
- Participants will leave with ideas on types of events and programs that have been offered to bring back to their organization.
- Participants will take away ideas on how to recommend change on policies and procedures to be more inclusive.



SESSIONS

1107

Exhibits on Any Budget

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

Location: Toronto, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom, Level

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Suzy Lyttle, Program Coordinator, Forest Preserve District of Will County; Heather Van Zyl, Program Coordinator, Forest Preserve District of Will County

Learn three different ways to approach exhibits in your nature center. First discover how to create and design interactive exhibits that won't break the budget. Then see how you can involve the community in art shows and traveling exhibits. Lastly, see how a nature center bid out for a conceptual design plan with professional design companies. We will show examples of each approach from Plum Creek Nature Center and Hidden Oaks Nature Center.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will have at least three seasonal ideas of hands-on activities to include in their own organization.
- Participants will have three new avenues to search for traveling exhibits in their own communities.
- Participants will learn how to be resourceful and efficient when planning rotating exhibits by discovering how two nature centers work together.