



SESSIONS

Saturday, January 25, 2025

KEYNOTE

The Tip Jar Culture: An Inspiring Approach to Rediscovering our Passion for the Work We Do Each Day

Topic Track: Keynote General Session

Location: Grand Ballroom C-F, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Speaker(s): Gregory Offner, keynote speaker, Global Performance Institute

Today we face a critical workforce challenge. Historically low morale, engagement, and connection in the workplace and with the work we do each day. Globally, businesses spend 20 billion dollars each year trying to improve employee engagement and retention. Still, less than 30 percent of the workforce is actively engaged and working toward their organization's success. What most people see as problems with workforce culture, or even themselves, are just symptoms of the real problem: the employment experience. In this unforgettable keynote, former dueling pianist turned award winning speaker, Gregory Offner, reveals three principles of engaging experiences—used in piano bars—and demonstrates the steps to bring them into your everyday experience at work - whether you're leading a team or just looking to feel more enjoyment and excitement at work.

Learning Objectives:

- A framework to create a sustainable engagement strategy that appeals to broad and diverse groups of people.
- Three tools to implement simple, but effective, shifts in the experience of work that eliminate the three major frustrations (irk) we have with work.
- Insight into the question that most leaders don't ask, but all employees wish they would.



SESSIONS

11

From Burned Out to Fueled Up – Five Tools to Spark Engagement & Wellbeing

Topic Track: Leadership/Management

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

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Lora Cheadle, CEO & Founder, Life Choreography Coaching & Advocacy

According to the World Health Organization, burnout costs the U.S. over \$500 billion per year. But what if it's not just burnout that's leading to exhaustion and overwhelm? What if it's a sense of betrayal stemming from unmet expectations instead? The shocking truth is that, like burnout, a sense of betrayal can lead to disillusionment, resentment, and disconnection from others. Until the root cause of those symptoms is identified, and the correct solution applied, negative feelings will prevail.

In this empowering presentation, lawyer-turned-life and leadership coach, Lora Cheadle, shows audiences how to FUEL UP so they can rekindle enthusiasm, increase resilience, and stay engaged and innovative for the long haul. By the end of this presentation, audience members will know how to identify, manage, and prevent the root cause of burnout and betrayal.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the difference between burnout and betrayal, uncover root causes of burnout-like symptoms, and create effective solutions.
- Explore the impact of expectations on satisfaction and learn to communicate and advocate effectively for themselves and others.
- Reclaim self-trust, navigate difficult conversations with resilience and humor, and establish healthy boundaries.



SESSIONS

19

Q&A is the Best Way to National Certification Exam Success

Topic Track: Leadership/Management

Location: Grand Suite 3, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Katie Troline, Founder/CEO/Trainer, Gold Medal Force, LLC; Duane Smith, Education Director, Illinois Park & Recreation Association

The way to pass the CPRP/CPRE exams is to A: study the content and B: PRACTICE ANSWERING QUESTIONS! Learn about the National Certification Exam requirements for both tests. We will then test your knowledge as you try to answer practice test questions. Tips for success are included in this session. Come and challenge yourself! You may be surprised at how much you really DO know!

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the requirements needed to sit for the national certification exams.
- Learn how to read and break down practice exam questions to help direct you to the right answers.
- Have a better understanding of your knowledge base to better prepare for the exams.



SESSIONS

115

Responding to First Amendment Audits

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

Location: Grand Hall K, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Steven Adams, Partner, Robbins Schwartz

Every citizen in every park and facility you operate is a potential First Amendment auditor. Not just activists, but everyday patrons with a dispute can begin recording instantly, with the goal of capturing and spreading video evidence of a First Amendment violation or improper or embarrassing behavior. This session will explain the First Amendment Audit, what needs to happen before the auditor arrives, and the do's and don'ts for commissioners and employees while an audit is occurring. Specific examples of First Amendment audits will be given and the options available to the public agency in each example will be discussed.

Learning Objectives:

- Actions your agency must take to prepare for the First Amendment auditor: training staff and protecting patrons and private areas.
- How to protect your employees from harassment by a First Amendment auditor.
- How to enact lawful and effective "rules of engagement."



SESSIONS

117

Having a Healthy and Prosperous Relationship with your Executive Director

Topic Track: Boardmanship

Location: Grand Suite 5, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Derke Price, Attorney, Ancel Glink

This session focuses on best practices for both Commissioners and Executive Directors for setting and achieving goals in pursuit of your District's mission. Among the topics discussed are: A review of the respective--and distinct--roles played by Commissioners and the Executive Director; considerations for whether to have an employment contract; and strategies for performance review and compensation.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn recommendations on how to set and manage expectations on all sides for success.
- Understand the formal methods and tools for managing the relationship.
- Appreciate the distinct roles to be played by the Board and by the Executive Director.



SESSIONS

124

Minutes Shouldn't Take Hours

Topic Track: Boardmanship

Location: Acapulco, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Christina Emmert, Professional Registered Parliamentarian, National Association of Parliamentarians

Often in a meeting the Secretary attempts to include every conversation that takes place during the meeting when the only items that belong in the minutes is the outcome of business that has been voting on. Learn how to streamline your minutes so members can find the information they are looking for quickly

Learning Objectives:

- Learn what belongs in the minutes and what doesn't.
- Learn how to properly format minutes.
- Learn how your organization's rules may affect how your minutes are written.



SESSIONS

134

So You're Thinking About Going Solar

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

Location: Roosevelt 3AB, East Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Adam Simon, Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; Karen Larson, Superintendent of Finance, Park Ridge Park District; Shawn Ajazi, Vice President, Progressive Business Solutions

The State and Federal governments are promoting the adoption of renewable energy. How can your agency take advantage of new opportunities in the green energy market to lower your expenses in the short- and long-term? This session will describe several options you can explore, from the lowest commitment to the most impactful.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about your options for power purchase agreements.
- Learn about community solar subscriptions.
- Learn about solar leases and development options.



SESSIONS

137

Funding Capital Projects: Bonding vs. Spending Reserves in the Current Market

Topic Track: Finance/Information Technology

Location: Toronto, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Dalena Welkome, Director, Baird Public Finance; Michelle Binns, Director, PFM Asset Management; AJ Truckenmiller, Associate Director, U.S. Public Finance

In the current market environment, park and forest preserve districts should evaluate the cost/benefit of bonding vs. spending down reserves to fund capital projects. In this session, we will provide an overview of investment and bond market conditions, compare and contrast the two strategies of bonding vs. spending reserves for capital projects, discuss how either approach to capital funding could impact bond ratings and share investment strategies and considerations as it relates to the investment of bond proceeds.

Learning Objectives:

- Evaluate bonding vs. spending reserves for capital projects in the current market environment.
- Understand how funding capital projects through bonds or reserves could impact bond ratings.
- Identify strategies to maximize investment returns on reserves and/or bond proceeds and navigate arbitrage rebate requirements.



SESSIONS

202

Creating Impactful Service for Any Organization

Topic Track: Parks/Natural Resources

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

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Robb Cleave MHRM, MBA, Volunteer Coordinator, Forest Preserve District of Kane County; Heather Herakovich PhD, Stewardship Liaison, Forest Preserve District of Kane County; Ryan Solomon, Ecological Restoration Supervisor, St Charles Park District; Amy Doll, Executive Director, Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves

Organizations of all sizes can reap tremendous benefits by allowing and utilizing volunteers to supplement their staff. Service projects can realize cost savings, encourage collaboration with your local community and strengthen engagement with your agency. This panel discussion featuring volunteer professionals from a diversity of organizations that will help answer questions to assist in unlocking volunteers' potential.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn how to start a volunteer program at their agency so they can utilize service.
- Participants will learn how to politely decline or suggest alternatives to service offers that do not align with the agency's mission.
- Participants will learn how proactively giving your volunteers the right tools and training benefits everyone.



SESSIONS

313

Safety Savvy: Training Organization and Compliance

Topic Track: HR/Risk Management

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

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Dani Hoefle, Superintendent of Parks, Buffalo Grove Park District; Rachel Caruso, Training and Risk Manager, Wheeling Park District

In today's fast-paced environment, ensuring that your agency meets accreditation, IDOL, and OSHA standards while staying on top of regular responsibilities can be a daunting task. This session is designed to guide you through the process of equipping your agency with essential training, compliance, and maintaining up-to-date documentation—all within a limited time frame. Whether you are a small agency or a large organization, this session will provide you with actionable steps to enhance your training programs, achieve compliance, and promote a culture of safety, all while managing time and budget constraints effectively. Recommended for safety coordinators, parks administrators, and members of a safety committee.

Learning Objectives:

- Identifying Key Training Needs: Determine the most critical training programs required for compliance and overall workplace safety.
- Efficient Training Delivery: Explore various methods to deliver training, including leveraging online resources, in-house expertise, & third-parties.
- Maintaining Comprehensive Documentation: Hear suggestions for documentation to ensure you are always prepared for an audit or inspection.



SESSIONS

316

Managing Employee Leaves of Absence and Accommodations

Topic Track: HR/Risk Management

Location: Grand Hall GH, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): David Moore, Partner, Co-Chair of Litigation Department, Laner Muchin, Ltd.; Sara Yager, General Counsel, Park District Risk Management Agency

Managing employee's leaves of absences, intermittent leave, paid time off, and telecommuting requests is challenging for supervisors and HR professionals alike. Employers' legal obligations are constantly changing. Sara Yager, PDRMA's General Counsel, and David Moore, Co-Chair of Laner Muchin's Litigation Department, will lead a collaborative discussion about key legal and compliance updates in this area, as well as about best practices in navigating this legal minefield.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand employers' legal obligations and rights when addressing intermittent and continuous leave under the FMLA, ADA, and related laws.
- Understand best practices for supervisors to follow when employees are absent from work for medical reasons or request related accommodations.
- Understand best practices for HR professionals to follow when managing leave, accommodations, paid time off, and related benefits.



SESSIONS

408

Crafting Learning Journeys: Preschool Curriculum Following the Understanding by Design (UbD) Model

Topic Track: Recreation

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

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Natalie Wood, Early Childhood Program Manager, Hoffman Estates Park District

This session delves into the principles and practices of Understanding by Design (UbD), an innovative framework that emphasizes backward planning to create meaningful and effective educational experiences. Participants will explore the three stages of UbD: identifying desired results, determining acceptable evidence, and planning learning experiences and instruction.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be able to articulate clear, measurable learning objectives that align with educational standards and effectively guide student learning
- Participants will be able to create diverse and authentic assessment methods that accurately measure student understanding and provide meaningful feedback
- Participants will be able to design and implement instructional activities that are engaging, purposeful, and promote deep understanding, ensuring that



SESSIONS

415

Our Leadership Role in Quality Youth Sports

Topic Track: Recreation

Location: Grand Hall I, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Lisa Licata, Senior Director, National Alliance for Youth Sports

Professional youth sports administrators play an integral role in the execution of high-quality youth sports experiences for their internal programs. Whether formal or informal leaders by title, these public entity staff are responsible to not only administer internal programs, but they are often tasked with assisting outside groups that may utilize the public facilities. When volunteer-run leagues use public facilities, especially when problems arise, the perception for many is that the public entity is ultimately responsible (you may have received the calls or emails, right?). This session will provide information regarding the important role of the public entity's youth sports administrator when working with local leagues and other recreational partners, plus we will explore ways to ensure compliance and accountability for everyone involved. A variety of important leadership strategies will also be explored that can assist the youth sports administrator to be consistent, efficient and effective.

Learning Objectives:

- Outline the roles and responsibilities of youth sports administrators to ensure predictable and consistent programs in their local communities.
- Summarize the current youth sports landscape, both locally and nationally, by analyzing the relationships between all the local providers.
- Identify the benchmarks of a quality youth sports environment to self-analyze initiatives and programs.



SESSIONS

503

Supporting Those Experiencing Domestic Violence

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

Location: Grand Hall L, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Aiyana Emsun, Education and Outreach Coordinator, A Safe Place

This training session on domestic violence aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Participants will learn about the definition of domestic violence and its various forms, and explore the specific impact and prevalence on individuals with disabilities, highlighting relevant statistics and rates. Attendees will be equipped with information about available resources and support systems designed to address domestic violence. This training seeks to empower participants with knowledge and tools necessary to recognize, respond to, and prevent domestic violence in diverse settings.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will increase their knowledge on what domestic violence is.
- Participants will feel more comfortable in identifying the signs of domestic violence within the populations they work with.
- Participants will increase their knowledge in resources that are available to support those experiencing domestic violence.



SESSIONS

605

Elevating Skills: The vital Role of Continuing Education for Trades Employees in Parks and Recreation

Topic Track: Facilities

Location: Grand Hall J, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Erin Chapa, Superintendent of Facility Operations, Schaumburg Park District

As the demand for skilled trades employees in the parks and recreation sector continues to grow, it is essential to invest in their ongoing education and professional development. This session will explore the critical role of continuing education in enhancing the skills, knowledge, and career advancement opportunities for trades employees. Attendees will gain insights into the benefits of structure training programs, innovative educational approaches, and the impact of such initiatives on employee performance and organizational success.

Learning Objectives:

- Explore effective training programs tailored for trades employees.
- Implement strategies for professional growth that align with organizational goals and employee career aspirations
- Succession planning, identifying key skills and competencies, and understanding how to measure the effectiveness of continuing education.



SESSIONS

908

Marketing (Taylor's Version)

Topic Track: Marketing/Communications

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

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Cassidy Reinhard, Marketing Specialist, Glenview Park District; Skylar Greenberg, Graphic Design & Media Specialist, Winnetka Park District; Deanna Johann, Marketing and Public Relations Manager, Gurnee Park District

Are you ready for it? In this dynamic session, we'll draw inspiration from Taylor Swift's groundbreaking marketing strategies to elevate your parks and recreation programs. Known for her ability to captivate audiences and build a fiercely loyal fan base, Taylor Swift's approach to marketing is a masterclass in storytelling, engagement, and reinvention.

Join us for Marketing (Taylor's Version) and watch your engagement and participation soar to new heights. Don't miss this chance to make your marketing efforts "Fearless!"

Learning Objectives:

- **Storytelling:** We'll guide you through storytelling techniques to "Speak Now" and connect with your audience authentically.
- **Engagement:** Turn your marketing into a "Wonderland" of creativity and impact, to make sure your residents "Stay Stay Stay."
- **Reinvention:** Ensure your marketing "Hits Different," even when promoting the same facilities and programs, year after year.



SESSIONS

1006

Stepping Away from Stigmas and Spotlights: Veterans in Outdoor Spaces

Topic Track: Diversity

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

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Neil Armstrong, Veteran and Macomb Park District Commissioner, Macomb Park District; Jeremy Robinett, Associate Professor, Western Illinois University - Recreation, Park, Tourism, and Hospitality

Veterans are unique and utilize outdoor spaces, like public parks, for a wide array of reasons. Participants in this session will learn more about The Great Outdoors Veteran Guide and Department of Veterans' Affairs Whole Health approach to healthy lifestyle choices. In addition, participants will learn best practices for engaging with military service members and their dependents to avoid stigmatizing service members as wounded warriors and/or shining an unexpected spotlight on their service at times when they may wish to be inconspicuous in nature.

Learning Objectives:

- Educate participants about trends and findings in research focused on veteran mental and physical health.
- Provide participants with resources they can use to facilitate discussions about outdoor space utilization with veterans and dependents.
- Provide participants information about ways to solicit information from veterans in appropriate ways.



SESSIONS

1109

Tech Trek: Enhancing Efficiency, Effectiveness & Engagement in Parks and Recreation

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

Location: Comiskey, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Speaker(s): Elizabeth Kessler, Executive Director, McHenry County Conservation District; Caitlynn Martinez-McWhorter, Director of Marketing & Education, McHenry County Conservation District; Gabriel Powers, Director of Land Preservation & Natural Resources, McHenry County Conservation District; Emelia Tegtman, IT Systems Administrator, McHenry County Conservation District

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, keeping pace with innovation is a constant challenge. Join us for a dynamic innovation showcase session designed to explore the latest tools and strategies transforming the parks and recreation industry. Dive into state-of-the-art applications and technologies that enhance land management, streamline human resources, optimize strategic planning, and improve workflow management, project management and customer relationships. Discover the power of AI, social media and other cutting-edge innovations to drive your organization towards greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Explore how technology can bridge gaps and foster integration across teams, departments, and divisions, enhancing agency cohesiveness and collaboration. Develop a comprehensive strategy to evaluate and adopt new technologies, ensuring they align with your agency's mission and objectives while fostering a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability. Learn how to identify the best tools for your needs and empower your team to stay at the forefront of industry advancements.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about and select the most effective tools for various functions within parks and recreation agencies.
- Integrate innovative technologies into workflows to streamline processes, improve communication, and achieve organizational goals efficiently.
- Adopt technologies aligned with your mission, fostering continuous improvement and adaptability through a comprehensive evaluation and strategy.



SESSIONS

17

Leading When Promoted from Within

Topic Track: Leadership/Management

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

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Jayne Miller, CPRP, PROS Consulting; Leon Younger, PROS Consulting

Leadership roles are challenging, whether you come new into an organization or if you are promoted from within. What does it mean to be promoted into a leadership position from within your organization? This leadership session will focus on the unique challenges and opportunities for individuals who are promoted from within while addressing the impact on relationships with colleagues who are no longer peers, drawing appropriate lines with others, holding others responsible, providing clear discernment on what you can give staff and what they need to do for themselves, and more.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will understand the research associated with traits, desires, and characteristics of individuals associated with promotions.
- Attendees will understand promotion challenges and transitions individuals need to make when promoted.
- Attendees will understand work individuals need to do when in a new leadership role.



SESSIONS

118

Park District Finance - It's Not Intuitive

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

Location: Roosevelt 3AB, East Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Adam Simon, Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; Mari-Lynn Peters, Director of Finance, Park District of Highland Park

Have you ever calculated your tax levy? Have you ever created a budget from scratch instead of just copying what happened last year? Do you know what financial reports need to be prepared and where they are filed? You are not alone! No matter what your role is in your organization, it's important to have a basic understanding of financial rules and procedures so you can ask intelligent questions and keep your agency on track.

Learning Objectives:

- Understanding how a tax levy is calculated and approved.
- Understanding how to develop and approve a budget and the appropriation ordinance.
- Learning what financial reports are required on an annual basis.



SESSIONS

122

Affiliates: A Blessing or a Curse?

Topic Track: Boardmanship

Location: Grand Suite 3, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Derke Price, Attorney, Ancel Glink

Affiliates are a useful tool to help deliver a variety of programming to your constituents; however, they also present numerous challenges. They also have a part to play in your capital program.

Learning Objectives:

- Best practices to formalize relationships with your affiliates.
- Navigating typical challenges and their solutions.
- How affiliates can contribute to your capital plans.



SESSIONS

125

The Agenda: In What Order Should Business Take Place

Topic Track: Boardmanship

Location: Acapulco, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): CHRISTINA EMMERT, Professional Registered Parliamentarian, National Association of Parliamentarians

How does an organization decide when to consider items of importance during the meeting? Robert's Rule of Order suggests a standard order of business as well as optional items to help guide an organization through their meeting. Find out how your organization compares of how you can address other important issues in a timely and efficient manner.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn the Standard Order of Business.
- Learn optional items that can be added to customize your meeting.
- Learn to look at your own rules and bylaws to find out if you are required to hold your meetings in a specific manner.



SESSIONS

129

Boardmanship Essentials Part I

Topic Track: Boardmanship

Location: Grand Hall K, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Steven Adams, Partner, Robbins Schwartz

This session provides essential, practical information every commissioner needs to know about public meetings, including requirements for conducting lawful regular, special, closed, and emergency meetings, mandatory public participation requirements, electronic (remote) participation, Robert's Rules fundamentals, risks of commissioner electronic communication, final action, special voting rules, training requirements for commissioners, posting compensation information, and more.

Learning Objectives:

- Ensure lawful and professional open and closed board meetings; avoid embarrassing and unlawful Open Meetings Act errors.
- Practical tips and strategies for communicating and attending meetings electronically.
- More efficient and professional meetings through Robert's Rules.



SESSIONS

135

Crossing the Line: What Park Districts Need to Know about the Migrant Crisis

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

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

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Keri-Lyn Krafthefer, Equity Partner, Ancel Glink, PC

Asylum seekers are coming to Illinois in droves. What is the cause behind this? Are they all illegal immigrants? What can park districts do to regulate or accommodate these populations lawfully? This session will discuss the factors that created the current influx of migrants into Illinois, facts about the asylum seekers, and lawful steps local governments can take to address the accommodation of these populations. We will also review steps park districts can take to eliminate bias against these populations. This session qualifies for DEI continuing legal education credit for Illinois attorneys.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn about the history that has created the current migrant crisis.
- Learn what park districts can do to accommodate and regulate migrants.
- Learn what park districts can do to prevent bias against asylum seekers.



SESSIONS

139

The NEW Americans with Disabilities Act Mandates: Can Parks and Recreation Agencies Keep Up? Part I

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

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

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): John McGovern, Principal-in-Charge, Accessibility Practice, The W-T Group, LLC
Accessibility Practice

Courts and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have been busy addressing access and inclusion issues for people with disabilities. A sampling of this work shows us final and enforceable DOJ website access requirements, settlement agreements in Virginia, Texas, and Illinois that drive home the important “program access test,” and Court decisions from Puerto Rico to California, and yes, Illinois. All send us the same message: the obligation of park districts and cities to make programs and infrastructure accessible has never been more important. This session reviews the ADA requirements for new construction and alterations, and applies that language to several disputes. We will also discuss the website access requirements and apply same to typical park district websites. Finally, as Illinois continues to change, we will discuss the reasonable modification mandate and smart practices that enable park districts to “do the right thing”. Bring your thorniest ADA questions to the session and leave with practical and pragmatic answers.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will discuss and apply the five methods of ADA enforcement.
- Attendees will discuss and apply the primary issues in at least five Court decisions, settlement agreements, or disputes.
- Attendees will identify smart practices that allow park, forest preserve, conservation districts, and SRAs to avoid access disputes.



SESSIONS

209

Stopping the Spread of the Invasive Weed Lesser Celandine: Planning, Control, Evaluation and Community Engagement

Topic Track: Parks/Natural Resources

Location: Grand Suite 5, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Ryan Anderson, Sustainable Landscaping Enthusiast, Independent Contractor; Kristi Solberg, Superintendent of Parks, Wilmette Park District; Alec McClennan, CEO, Good Nature Organic Lawn Care; Nicholas Fuller, Principal Ecological Officer, Natural Communities, LLC

Experts and practitioners from Midwest Grows Green, Natural Communities, LLC., Good Nature Organic Lawn Care, and the Wilmette Park District invite Soaring to New Heights Conference attendees to participate in this panel discussion for how Greater Chicago natural area managers can collaborate to stop the spread of lesser celandine (*Ficaria verna*). Lesser celandine has high potential to dominate many Greater Chicago greenspaces in the future. This invasive weed germinates in late winter or early spring and crowds out native plants that bloom at similar times. Many Greater Chicago residents may not recognize this plant as invasive, because nurseries can still sell lesser celandine and lesser celandine grows attractive yellow flowers. In 2024, Wilmette Park District and the other roundtable discussion leaders observed increased lesser celandine pressure across Wilmette and the Illinois coastal region. Many Illinois organizations have shared monitoring and control strategies for lesser celandine on their websites. However, these resources do not record long-term control and reduction of this weed in Greater Chicago and nationwide. The panel discussion participants discuss strategies that educate residents about the importance of identifying and controlling lesser celandine on their properties and equip large greenspace managers with effective lesser celandine control products, strategies and policies.

Learning Objectives:

- Improve lesser celandine identification by reviewing the weed's life cycle, biology and physical characteristics.
- Teach best management practices for lesser celandine in natural areas.
- Share strategies to engage the public in lesser celandine control.



SESSIONS

306

Beyond the Offer: Mastering Onboarding and Orientation for Long-Term Success

Topic Track: HR/Risk Management

Location: Grand Hall J, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): LoriKay Paden, Community Vice President, YMCA of Delaware

Hiring doesn't end when a candidate accepts the job. One of the most crucial aspects of the hiring process is the onboarding and orientation of new team members. Both newly hired and internally promoted employees need a thoughtful and systematic plan to ensure their success. Effective onboarding and orientation enhance retention, boost productivity, and foster a more positive work environment for both leaders and team members. In this workshop, we will explore success stories and challenges in our hiring and onboarding practices. You'll learn how to ensure staff at all levels are well-equipped and motivated to excel in their roles. Participants will leave with sample onboarding plans and resources to implement in their organizations.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the critical role of effective onboarding and orientation for employees at all levels, from front-line staff to executive leaders.
- Learn how to create and implement a standardized orientation program for new employees at all organizational levels.
- Learn how to develop and implement standardized onboarding plans for all levels of staff, from front-line staff to executive leadership.



SESSIONS

314

Tech-Forward Parks & Rec: Transforming Recreation with AI and Innovation

Topic Track: Finance/Information Technology

Location: Grand Hall L, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Vincent Davis, Membership Manager, IPRA; Joe Wright, President, Noventech; Sean Chang, Founder, DoubleSpot

Discover how cutting-edge AI tools, innovative workflows, and emerging technologies can revolutionize parks and recreation management. Learn practical strategies to enhance operational efficiency, improve decision-making, and boost community engagement through advanced tech applications.

Learning Objectives:

- Introduce various AI tools and their benefits.
- Demonstrate innovative workflows for optimized operations.
- Explore new technologies enhancing visitor experiences and community engagement.



SESSIONS

404

Health, Happiness, and the Great Outdoors

Topic Track: Recreation

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

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Jan Peterson Hincapie, Speaker, Consultant, and Retired Parks and Recreation Director

Health, Happiness, and the Great Outdoors is an eight-week program that can be used for camp, afterschool care, or as a stand-alone program. Each week has a topic relating to animals, nature, healthy food, and outdoor activities. The program debuted at the Wood Dale Park District, funded in part by a Power!Play Beyond School Grant from the Illinois Association of Park Districts. Come hear about this turnkey program that you can plug into your program portfolio to send positive messages to kids and their families about the value of spending time outside, green practices, and kindness to animals.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the benefits of time outside for all individual and gain ideas for ways to enhance the outdoor experience for their residents.
- Identify an existing program or the need for a new program to utilize these theme, activities, and resources.
- Recall the benefits of establishing a theme for camp, afterschool care, or a stand-alone program to keep program ideas and activites in a cohesive, re



SESSIONS

405

It is All in the Details: Going the Extra Mile

Topic Track: Recreation

Location: Grand Hall I, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Mary Stallings, Adult Activities Manager, Dundee Township Park District; Teresa Grodsky, Retired

ATTENTION adult programmers for 50 and over age group, you don't want to miss this! We all want our programs to be successful and to have our participants compliment them and look forward to coming back for more. Learn some tips on having your programs shine above the rest. It is in the little things that we do, going above and beyond, that can make our programs be the best that they can be. You will walk away with 20 ways to enhance your current programming.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn new and special tips to enhance your events, programs and trips.
- Understand why it is important to never forget the small stuff that makes the big difference.
- Learn ways to evaluate your program for what is important for drawing people to your program.



SESSIONS

603

Creating a Safety Plan: Mitigating Risks and Ensuring Safety

Topic Track: Facilities

Location: Grand Hall GH, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Johnathan Nies, Project Director, Councilman-Hunsaker

Empower your staff to become champions of safety in the aquatics industry. We'll delve into the cornerstones of safety plans, equipping you with the knowledge and tools to grasp the various types and benefits of safety plans, understanding their critical role in protecting patrons; master the art of safety assessment, identifying potential hazards before they become incidents; navigate the process of crafting and implementing a watertight safety plan, ensuring it meets all regulatory requirements; develop the skills for ongoing evaluation and improvement, keeping your safety plan dynamic and effective.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify hazards (slips, drowning) & create a safer swim experience for everyone.
- Aid operators gaining an understanding and complying with safety regulations..
- Assist in safeguarding aquatics facilities and staff from liability by mitigating risks and preventing accidents, reducing the likelihood of lawsuits.



SESSIONS

907

You Can, Canva! Unlock Creativity & Efficiency at Your Agency

Topic Track: Marketing/Communications

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

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Lonna Converso, Director of Marketing & Communications; Joe Potts, Executive Director; Jackie Tithof Steere, Director of Administration; Aileen Morales, Digital Specialist; Nicole Ginger, Recreation Supervisor; Jackie Tithof-Steere, Director of Administration; Nathanael Davila, Front Desk Supervisor, Bloomingdale Park District

This session is a panel discussion on how Canva can transform your organization's design capabilities throughout the agency. Canva's user-friendly interface allows anyone to create professional-quality graphics quickly, saving both time and money. Discover how Canva's vast library of templates, images, and fonts can streamline your design process.

Explore how Canva's collaborative tools can turn your team into a creative powerhouse, enabling real-time editing and feedback. We'll discuss maintaining brand consistency with Canva's branding tools, ensuring your marketing materials look sharp across all platforms. Take away practical tips for maximizing Canva's potential across several departments at your Park District. We'll conclude with a Q&A segment to address specific challenges and share insights. By the end of this session, you'll be ready to use Canva to create stunning designs, enhance team collaboration, and achieve outstanding marketing results, all while having a bit of fun.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn how to collaborate at your agency using Canva.
- Receive examples of how to integrate Canva into your entire workplace.
- Review short video tips in the Canva software.



SESSIONS

1008

Innovative Programs, Quality Instructors, and Healthy Communities: The Role of Parks Professionals in Growing Tennis

Topic Track: Diversity

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

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Amelia Storer, Manager, Tennis Venue Services, United States Tennis Association; Todd Carlson, Director, Tennis Venue Services, Parks, & CTAs, United States Tennis Association

Parks and recreation professionals are invited to discover how the United States Tennis Association (USTA) is partnering with park agencies to promote healthier people and communities through tennis. Learn about new initiatives to increase the availability of quality coaching at all levels through diverse training opportunities and resources for coaches, instructors, and teaching professionals. Explore various tennis formats, equipment, and programs designed to engage players of all ages and skill levels. The USTA is committed to improving the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of communities through tennis and has prioritized collaborating and strengthening relationships with park agencies to achieve this goal.

Learning Objectives:

- Discover the USTA's training workshops and professional development resources for tennis coaches, instructors, and teaching professionals.
- Learn about fun and creative programming opportunities for tennis players of all ages and abilities.
- Hear how the USTA Foundation is impacting over 150,000 under-resourced youth each year through free or low-cost tennis and education programming.



SESSIONS

1105

Recreational Hunting: An On Ramp for the Conservation Highway

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

Location: Comiskey, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Speaker(s): Kim Compton, Education and Visitor Center Services Coordinator, McHenry County Conservation District; Gabe Powers, Conservation Ecology Manager, McHenry County Conservation District; Ryan Stewart, Chief of Police, McHenry County Conservation District

The McHenry County Conservation District has provided a public recreational hunting program for 23 years and has utilized the pastime to connect people to the land, manage resources, nurture partnerships, and advance conservation in the county. More recently we created the Hunter Safety Summer Camp, in part to help meet the demand for state safety courses. This innovative and adaptive program became quite popular and nearly 250 youth and teens have graduated since 2017. These graduates not only receive their hunter safety cards, but they also gain valuable knowledge to help them along their paths to becoming responsible, ethical hunters. From there, the Conservation District established a Conservation Hunter Initiative to engage hunters of all ages and to promote them to a sixth stage of hunter development where they will serve as Ambassadors for Conservation.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be able to apply some of the Hunter safety camp activities to their own education programs.
- Participants will understand how hunter safety training can develop partners, create supporters, and recruit volunteers for conservation.
- Participants will be given tools to help their own organizations begin to shift public neutral or antagonistic perspectives into support.



SESSIONS

20

Journeying Together: Navigating Professional Development As Mentor and Mentee

Topic Track: Leadership/Management

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

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Tracey Crawford, Executive Director, Northwest Special Recreation Association

This session is tailored to guide both mentors and mentees through the intricacies of professional development within the context of succession planning. It will delve into strategies for personal growth, fostering a supportive environment, and leveraging the mentor-mentee relationship to achieve professional milestones as you both journey through the professional development process.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the role of professional development in career advancement and succession planning.
- Identify the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to navigate their professional development journey as a mentee and mentor.
- Learn to create a supportive and collaborative mentorship environment, to overcome their challenges, achieve their goals, and thrive in their respect



SESSIONS

130

Boardmanship Essentials Part II

Topic Track: Boardmanship

Location: Grand Hall K, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Steven Adams, Partner, Robbins Schwartz

This session explores the often difficult legal and practical challenges of governing with a challenging commissioner, a divided board, and/or an angry public. We will address the legal and practical tools available to manage these challenges, restore board credibility, and grow professionalism. The PAC Request for Review process will be explained. We will identify the traits of an exceptional board.

Learning Objectives:

- Obtain legal and practical strategies for managing defiant commissioners, moving forward with a divided board or a hostile public.
- Obtain essential knowledge of the PAC Request for Review process.
- Learn strategies to build a more professional board, prioritize and deliver on important initiatives, and establish greater public credibility.



SESSIONS

136

Planning for a Referendum: Available Options, Key Points and Milestones

Topic Track: Finance/Information Technology

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

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Dalena Welkomer, Director, Baird Public Finance; Kyle Harding, Partner, Chapman and Cutler LLP

Planning for a successful referendum involves multiple steps that include legal considerations, strategy development, and engagement with local voters. This interactive session will cover the reasons behind going to referendum, available referendum options, required steps, factors to consider when developing a referendum strategy and what public officials and government employees can and cannot do regarding governmental entities with successful referenda.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand available referendum options, required corporate action and related deadlines.
- Understand strategies utilized by other governmental agencies in connection with successful referenda.
- Learn election interference and Ethics Act considerations.



SESSIONS

140

Board Policy Manuals: Why They Are Essential For Your Agency

Topic Track: Boardmanship

Location: Grand Hall L, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Scott Puma, Attorney, Ancel Glink; Erin Monforti, Attorney, Ancel Glink

This session will focus on best practices for policy manuals. We will discuss the provisions that you need to include while also reviewing when agencies need to refer to the manual and how to follow it so that the board's business gets done. We will also discuss the legal implications of various provisions and provide real world examples of how board policy manuals can assist with board governance.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand why a board policy manual is necessary.
- Know when to review your board policy manual.
- Know how to effectively use your board policy manual.



SESSIONS

141

The NEW Americans with Disabilities Act Mandates: Can Parks and Recreation Agencies Keep Up? Part II

Topic Track: Governance/Legal

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

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): John McGovern, Principal-in-Charge, Accessibility Practice, The W-T Group, LLC
Accessibility Practice

Courts and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have been busy addressing access and inclusion issues for people with disabilities. A sampling of this work shows us final and enforceable DOJ website access requirements, settlement agreements in Virginia, Texas, and Illinois that drive home the important “program access test,” and Court decisions from Puerto Rico to California, and yes, Illinois. All send us the same message: the obligation of park districts and cities to make programs and infrastructure accessible has never been more important. This session reviews the ADA requirements for new construction and alterations and applies that language to several disputes. We will also discuss the website access requirements and apply same to typical park district websites. Finally, as Illinois continues to change, we will discuss the reasonable modification mandate and smart practices that enable park districts to “do the right thing.” Bring your thorniest ADA questions to the session and leave with practical and pragmatic answers.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will discuss and apply the five methods of ADA enforcement.
- Attendees will discuss and apply the primary issues in at least five Court decisions, settlement agreements, or disputes.
- Attendees will identify smart practices that allow park, forest preserve, conservation districts, and SRAs to avoid access disputes.



SESSIONS

308

Developing a Lifeguard Audit Program for Peak Performance

Topic Track: HR/Risk Management

Location: Comiskey, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Johnathan Nies, Project Director, Counsilman-Hunsaker

This session explores how lifeguard auditing programs can benefit your aquatic facility. We'll discuss how audits identify areas for improvement in lifeguard skills, ensure adherence to safety protocols, and promote open communication for a collaborative safety culture.

Learning Objectives:

- This session explores how lifeguard auditing programs can benefit your aquatic facility. We'll discuss how audits identify areas for improvement in li
- This session explores how lifeguard auditing programs can benefit your aquatic facility. We'll discuss how audits identify areas for improvement in li
- Learn how audits can foster open communication, collaboration, and a shared commitment to safety within your team.



SESSIONS

407

Just Be In The Room

Topic Track: Recreation

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

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Tanita Cook-Nelson, Program Director, Gwinnett County

In this session, we will explore how increasing awareness of individual personalities can help align personal interests and goal setting. We will identify specific strengths and areas of opportunity to recognize individual expertise, enabling consistency in goal setting and overall productivity. Additionally, we will discover the value of challenging individual comfort levels and engaging in the exchange of information with other leaders.

Learning Objectives:

- Explore how increased awareness of individual personalities can help align personal interests and goal setting.
- Identify specific strengths and areas of opportunity as a strategy to recognize individual expertise and achieve consistency in goal setting and overa
- Discover the value in challenging individual comfort levels while exchanging information with other leaders.



SESSIONS

409

Active Adults/Senior Programming: “Start Where you Are- Build an Active Adult/Senior Membership from within”

Topic Track: Recreation

Location: Grand Hall I, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Megan Ulczak, Program Supervisor Arts and Active Adults, Park District of Oak Park

Building programming and gaining the trust of our older adult population is often one of our biggest challenges. In this energetic session, learn how to bring together programming you might already run or some you currently offer in your district. With a few additions and changes, you too can create membership opportunities for your current participants and beef up your age-specific programming.

Learning Objectives:

- Membership creation.
- Program expansion.
- Connecting with participants.



SESSIONS

509

ABA 101

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

Location: Grand Hall GH, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Brianna Pickel, State Director , Key Autism Services; Jovana Torress, BCBA, Key Autism Services

Get ready to think about behaviors in an entirely different way! Key Autism Service, an ABA provider supporting children diagnosed with autism, is excited to share their experience via an engaging, informative format: ABA-101. This presentation is designed to enlighten, inform and entertain, while staying laser focused on behavior therapy and it's practical applications to everyday life.

Learning Objectives:

- Present the science behind Applied Behavior Analysis in an easy-to-understand manner.
- Engage the audience through examples involving both neurodivergent and neurotypical scenarios.
- Provide proven strategies and tactics to employ when faced with challenging behaviors.



SESSIONS

611

Build the Foundation of Your Fitness Facility Programming with Health Coaching Services

Topic Track: Facilities

Location: Grand Suite 3, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Beckie Gacki, MA, MBA, PMP, CEO, Build UR Best U, LLC

A healthy lifestyle is not just about strict diets and intense workouts. However, many people believe this is the only path to health. As a fitness professional, you know that there are more sustainable and enjoyable ways to achieve a healthy lifestyle. But how do you convey this to your community members?

Break down this barrier by providing them with a path to building the healthy life they desire. Imagine a community where members feel energized, happy, and motivated to visit your facility because the services offered meet them where they are in their health journey. Your foundational programming empowers your members to be the architects of their own healthy lifestyles.

Coach Beckie, a former personal trainer and current health coach, understands the valuable role that health coaching services can provide. By the end of this workshop, she will demonstrate how health coaching services can supplement and enhance your fitness facility programming, creating a supportive and engaging environment for all members.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the value of incorporating health coaching services into their fitness facility programming.
- Identify two ways that health coaching services could supplement fitness programming.
- Develop a basic implementation plan for integrating health coaching services into their current fitness facility offerings.



SESSIONS

909

Practical Steps to Build Your Personal Brand Today

Topic Track: Marketing/Communications

Location: Grand Suite 5, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Nuria Garcia Nogueron, Content Director, NbN Marketing

In an increasingly competitive professional landscape, a robust personal brand is key to standing out and making a lasting impact. This session will explore the essentials of personal branding, offering practical strategies for building and sustaining a compelling personal brand. Learn how to effectively use social media platforms to amplify your reach, establish credibility, and enhance your professional influence. This hands-on session provides actionable strategies and tools to define, develop, and enhance your personal brand. Participants will actively create content and refine their online presence, ensuring they can start implementing their new branding skills immediately.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will define their unique personal brand and develop a clear branding strategy.
- Gain practical experience in creating and distributing high-quality content on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.
- Learn how to leverage this towards your personal life to get new opportunities through your company or by yourself.



SESSIONS

911

Build Community Trust by Leveraging the Power of Parks, Planning and P.R.

Topic Track: Marketing/Communications

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

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Sameera Luthman, Director of Marketing and Communications, Naperville Park District; Eric Shutes, Director of Planning, Naperville Park District; Tim Quigley, Director of Parks, Naperville Park District

The marketing and communications function is a two-sided coin – one side represents the dynamic marketing/promotions aspect, while the other side constitutes the more pragmatic and structured public relations focus. While both are essential, when it comes to educating and informing your community, it's time to leverage the power of P.R.! Opportunities to do so abound with the work overseen by the Parks and Planning Departments given the multitude of themes, communication needs, and information to convey. Learn how to be proactive in developing a communications strategy to minimize public conflict and concerns, understand the ways the interconnectedness of these three functions can enhance brand perception and foster community trust, and discover the importance of creating a framework to assist in the implementation of 11th hour problem-solving.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the synergies between parks, planning and public relations and how linking these disciplines can have a positive impact on your agency.
- Learn to prioritize and develop ways to inform residents on topics that involve agency capital improvement projects, maintenance, and the environment.
- Leave with recommendations for developing a collaborative team-based framework to quickly and effectively manage the resolution of community concerns.



SESSIONS

1009

Welcoming Immigrants & Offering Culturally Pertinent Programming - 3 Different Perspectives from 3 First Time Latino Commissioners to Sit on Board

Topic Track: Diversity

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

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Jacqueline Herrera Giron, Park District Board Commissioner, Waukegan Park District; Chris Hernandez, Park District Commissioner, Bensenville Park District ; Claudia Fonseca, Board Commissioner, Wheeling Park District

The session will describe the efforts and outreach put into practice by the park districts to welcome migrants and Latinos, and create culturally relevant programming for the Latino Community.

Learning Objectives:

- Geographic population and experience when elected as first Latino Commissioner.
- Bilingual outreach.
- Culturally relevant programming.



SESSIONS

1108

Inclusion: Be More Than A Buzzword

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

Location: Grand Hall J, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Speaker(s): Lydia Pond, Director of Visitor Services, Forest Preserve District Will County

Buzzwords might attract new visitors, but it takes more than words to make everyone feel welcome. Real inclusion is designing your interpretation with the purpose of allowing individuals, regardless of their ability level, the opportunity to participate together. Learn how to make meaningful and impactful changes that turn new visitors into lifelong participants.

In November 2023, after nearly two years of work, the Four Rivers Environmental Education Center from the Forest Preserve District of Will County became the first nature center in the country fully accredited by the National Inclusion Project. This process included simple, but effective facility upgrades, re-examining the way programs were designed and implemented, and training staff to see inclusion as the first consideration and not just an add on.

Learn basic tools and techniques that can elevate a single day-program, a permanent field trip, or even an entire facility! Experience how even simple changes, like picture sizes and cellphone live transcription, can make an immediate difference for all participants while remaining cost-effective for you. Meaningful inclusion is both realistic and attainable.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn how inclusion differs from accessibility or accommodations.
- Learn to assess your own facility for inclusion upgrades.
- Experience inclusion tools and their applicability to programming.