

IOWA



PARKS AND RECREATION ASSOCIATION



Strategic Plan

February 2017

How to use this Plan

A strategic plan identifies where an organization is and where it wants to be in the future. The strategic plan begins by setting the vision and mission for the Iowa Parks and Recreation Association. A vision statement reflects the broad, future identity of the IPRA. The mission statement focuses on what the IPRA will do to achieve its vision.

Vision and mission statements mean little without a strategy to implement them. The strategic directions in the IPRA Strategic Plan fall under five categories to better focus efforts and provide clear directions for the IPRA in the next 3–5 years. The Strategic Plan provides priority action items to get started under each category. However, it will be the IPRA leadership who develops a full list of actions to push the strategic directions forward. While the strategic categories are separate in the Plan, many overlap and depend on the others to be pursued to their fullest.

The IPRA Strategic Plan should be viewed as a dynamic, changing document. It is not meant to be rigid or static, but should adapt in response to changing conditions, resources and opportunities—likely every 3–5 years. Updates to the Plan should be made as a collaboration with the IPRA membership, much like how the original Plan was developed. All members and the public should have easy access to the Plan at all times.

At minimum, Staff and the Board of Directors should undertake an annual evaluation of the Strategic Plan. This evaluation should include what actions have been taken under each strategic direction, what items will be pursued next and where any changes should be made. To ensure regular communication, a member of the Board of Directors should be assigned a strategic direction to report on during every meeting.



Preamble

The Strategic Plan for the Iowa Parks and Recreation Association (IPRA) is based on the input of more than 70 members through a series of focus groups, 127 members participating in an on-line survey, and 20 members participating in an intense half-day workshop to critique an early-draft strategic framework. This strategy was refined through additional review by the Steering Committee, Board of Directors (BOD) and IPRA staff. The Plan's intent is to provide a direction for the future of IPRA over the next 3–5 years while outlining tools to measure success and steps that will kick off implementation. Staff and BOD will want to couple this strategy with an annual action plan to ensure ongoing success.

Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

VISION

A professional organization of engaged members dedicated to achieving the highest levels of parks and recreation services for the communities of Iowa

MISSION

To help members develop their careers and support lasting parks and recreation systems

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: *Member–Driven. Service–Focused.*

1. **Member–driven and accessible.** IPRA must first and foremost be guided by the voices of its many members and provide members access to all tiers of the organization while delivering high-quality services.
2. **Sustainable and innovative.** IPRA must stand the test of time through thoughtful management of its resources, outreach for member growth, transparency in its operations and staying on top of advancements in the parks and recreation field.
3. **Enhanced through collective strength.** IPRA's strength stems not just from services it delivers, but from the education and collective voice it can provide on behalf of parks and recreation systems and professionals. Advocacy efforts should include elected officials at all levels of government, particularly statewide.
4. **Leadership and networking nurtured.** IPRA's value lies in large part through its ability to foster the personal and professional growth of its members, offering enrichment, networking, education and opportunities to lead.
5. **Diverse needs balanced.** IPRA strives to deliver an appropriate mix of services reflecting the wide-ranging needs of members at different points in their careers, and communities of various shapes and sizes.

Strategic Directions

The following categories provide direction that stems from general themes identified by member input and trends in the profession: **Sustain, Inform, Unite, Grow, and Track.** Each does not stand alone and they often overlap with each other to implement the Strategic Plan, aligning with the overall vision, mission and guiding principles. A “Let's Get Started” piece under each category lists priority initiatives to begin with, but is only a starting point. Many other actions need to be identified to build each strategic direction over the next 3–5 years.



1. SUSTAIN



IPRA is a quality organization, but any strategy must look at what it takes for the organization to stand the test of time. This typically prompts strategies related to revenue streams and membership growth. At the same time, programs and services feed into the IPRA's long-term value to its members.

A. Expand and enhance member connections by improving the ability for members to connect around similar needs

- i. Support working committees or other programming avenues to expand outreach/services to member sub-groups, (e.g., small-community parks/rec leaders, rec center managers, natural resources managers, etc.), through new or current committee structures. (Note: Aquatics committee is a successful model for IPRA and likely worthy of modeling for other committees)
- ii. Assist members to self-connect for personalized career development and professional counsel
 - a. Establish an enhanced member database, allowing members to identify career stages and specific experiences of members for direct one-to-one outreach
- iii. Survey to determine the potential value of, and interest in, any ongoing mentoring program
- iv. Launch/advance regional and/or localized approaches for connecting members in different regions of Iowa (See **"Grow"**)
- v. Employ web-based/on-line strategies for connectivity and professional development (See **"Inform"**)

B. Boost member knowledge and understanding of the committee structure, identifying responsibilities of each committee in achieving all strategic directions.

- i. Create a mini action statement for each committee, stating its main purpose

- ii. Review committees for gaps and where additional committees may be needed (e.g., Technology committee/task force)

C. Identify new revenue streams and cost reductions

- i. Explore expansion of training, institutes and similar programs with net revenues
- ii. Annually review services provided for value and efficiency; cut/tweak as required and where savings can be quantified

D. Budget for technology

- i. Launch a technology needs assessment as first step

E. Accommodate changing needs of commercial members to enhance support and benefits to the IPRA

- i. Retool approach to conference's vendor exhibits/trade show

Note: Recognize vendor members' sustaining contributions to the IPRA and consider this item for priority action

F. Partner with affiliate organizations to prepare case studies for information and ideas supporting IPRA's continuous improvement (see also "Unite")

G. Communicate regularly with members on what their fees support and the value of the IPRA to continue retention of existing members

Kick-off: Launch technology needs assessment

Establish and convene a technology task force (see below)

Task force and staff issue RFP to IT consultant for needs assessment; incorporate data survey results (see below)

Allow six-week window for proposal return; eight months for study

Secure needs assessment by March 2018

Review and launch first steps for implementation by October 2018, with the focus to further the strategic directions throughout the Plan

Responsibility: Staff/new technology task force

Let's get started!

Success Looks Like...

- **Increased member volunteers on IPRA committees and in leadership positions.**
- **Enhanced technology in service to the organization**

2. INFORM



Nearly every organization benefits from working to improve information access, transparency, and ongoing communications. In the case of IPRA, expanding its use of technology surfaces as an element to maintain a high level of information exchange, but some basic ongoing communication upgrades will also benefit organizational efforts.

A. Upgrade the organization's access to and use of technology

- i. Continue to focus on ongoing website improvements to increase its value to members and the public.
 - a. Develop a members-only log-in for access to additional information to add more value to membership
 - b. Continue assessing the website and adapt to achieve improved appeal and efficiencies
- ii. Leverage technologies to continue and increase ongoing education and connection events (e.g., webinars, Skype meetings, online forums, surveys/data input, etc.)
- iii. Use technologies to overcome geographic distances
- iv. Activate social media following other information/technology advancements as another means of communication.



B. Improve members' ability to access information

- i. Routinely and promptly post and distribute board meeting minutes/updates, committee meeting notes, survey results, etc.
- ii. Adapt e-blasts and monthly magazines as members' needs change over time.



Kick-off: Continue focus on website improvement and information distribution

Use the technology assessment (See “**Sustain**”) to identify top-tier needs for improvement and the website's role in implementing all strategies

Develop methods/mechanisms for nearly-immediate distribution of board/committee meeting agendas and minutes by Staff

Follow up within three months on mechanisms for posting/distribution of all communications; “routine” and “efficient” are keys to success

Responsibility: Staff/Ad Hoc Committee

Let's get started!

Success Looks Like...

- **Increased website visits/traffic**

3. UNITE



Along with professional and membership enrichment, the core of IPRA should be to promote the foundation upon which it was formed: quality and lasting parks and recreation systems in Iowa. While the organization cannot undertake this monumental task alone, it can be the voice through meaningful partnerships and tactful communication with leaders at all levels, and members of the public. Innovation in communication and evidence-based advocacy are necessary to better compete for a wide range of resources needed to move the strategy forward. Currently, IPRA's legislative committee is one-member strong. Expansion of this committee is required. Development of legislative agendas and advocacy strategies appropriate to a legal structure like the IPRA are fodder for future conference topics and expanded partnerships.

A. Provide opportunities for members to become involved with advocacy efforts

- i. Create additional leadership opportunities, particularly in the Legislative committee
- ii. Identify a strategy for successive leadership to ensure continuity as committee membership changes

B. Coordinate a united platform on IPRA advocacy priorities

- i. Streamline a legislative agenda annually and track priority policies
- ii. Educate and train parks and recreation leaders to advocate for themselves
- iii. Activate citizens to rally on behalf of their local systems and build support within their communities

C. Improve information access for decision-makers at the state and local level

- i. Communicate the many benefits of parks and recreation systems that lead to resource prioritization by local and state leaders to the field (Use strategies under “**Inform**” and “**Track**”)

D. Develop appropriate partnerships to strengthen the voice of IPRA and its mission

- i. Seek partnerships with similar organizations and experts in the profession for expanded understanding of parks and recreation benefits and associated outreach—both for advocacy efforts and education of the public



Kick-off: Grow and strengthen the roles of the Legislative Committee

Expand legislative committee to develop more member leaders

Determine data/research/partners needed to generate support

Solidify a regular advocacy communication plan with local leaders, identified partners and general membership

Launch communication/advocacy agenda in the fall of 2018, ensuring agenda items are easily accessible (tech assessment)

Responsibility: Staff/Legislative Committee

Let's get started!

Success Looks Like...

- Increases in percentage of membership that feel informed on IPRA support activities
- More engagement around legislative issues; development of a legislative agenda

4. GROW



Career development of members and recruitment to the ranks of IPRA are core to the IPRA mission. “Grow” references the personal growth of individual members as they gain experience and knowledge through IPRA, and it refers to the organization. When IPRA successfully brings new members into the parks and recreation fold and/or adds someone to its membership roster, growth of both the profession and the organization occurs.

A. Create demand for pursuit of the parks and recreation profession

- i. Enhance appeal of the profession to high school and college students and emerging professionals.
- ii. Recognize the “second career” appeal of parks and recreation pursuits, particularly for new professionals in smaller communities
- iii. Coordinate and enhance new and current college outreach efforts.
- iv. Connect with students in parks/recreation, conservation and sports management career fields

B. Expand recruitment to IPRA to professionals at all stages of their careers

- i. Engage vendors and other related professions
- ii. Develop pre-college youth recruitment strategies
 - a. Consider the many touch points through lifeguarding, organized sports, summer camps, etc.
- iii. Develop second-career/retiree recruitment strategies

C. Expand/grow youth leadership (to complement Leadership Institute)

- i. Encourage input that leads to action
- ii. Use the organization’s structure to offer leadership opportunities

D. Expand/grow career–sustaining support systems to tenured professionals

- i. Explore Parks & Recreation Professional Certifications, enhanced training
- ii. Craft lifelong learning opportunities for retirees to remain involved and/or mentor other members
- iii. Advance “regional rendezvous” to provide ongoing, localized support for members and prospective members in different regions

Let’s get started!

Kick-off: Develop and/or advance outreach to colleges and universities—both professors and students

Kick-off: Advance regional rendezvous, using a similar format across the state

Identify a college action/communication task force	Identify multiple regional sites across the state: 4–6 total
Nine months to plan a pilot effort	Identify and train member leaders to organize a rendezvous at each site—annually or semi-annually
Launch pilot by Fall 2018	Tailor events to member needs and gaps in conference topics (rotate locations with same topic)
Responsibility: Board of Directors Leadership Committee/Young Professionals Network	Responsibility: Staff/Membership Committee, including members from the Young Professionals Network

Success Looks Like...

- Increased percentage of involvement from members/non-members outside of central Iowa.
- IPRA membership increases for those with under 5 years of experience, including students, by 10 percent over 3 years.

5. TRACK



IPRA members ask that IPRA up its data game, increasing its capacity to serve as a data-driven organization. Data collection in many categories is essential to provide a full complement of member services. Monitoring trends is one valuable piece, but also understanding the members and their changing needs can make all the difference in IPRA's capacity to serve the parks and recreation profession and sustain itself. At the same time, it is this section of the strategy that is crafted to measure the success and/or needs of implementing this strategy in the short, medium and long term across all strategic categories.

A. Monitor and support research of parks/facility usage and innovations to support adoption of best practices

- i. Enrich program offerings to lead in understanding outcomes of new trends and innovations

B. Collect/compile and share parks and recreation system comparative data

- i. Consider national, regional and statewide, seeking assistance from universities, other organizations, or comparable state park and recreation associations

C. Establish data relevant to career development and share/distribute

D. Enhance the membership directory through on-line tools for improved networking and exchange of ideas

Part of the "Track" strategic direction should be a process to review implementation of the Strategic Plan. Established metrics create a baseline to track trends and how well certain strategies are progressing. Several priority metrics are given, which the IPRA can easily track through membership data and simple surveys. Other metrics should be considered over time as additional action items become ready for implementation.

E. Develop a data dashboard to assess progress of this strategic document over time

- i. Priority measures to track include:
 - a. Increases in member volunteers that serve or have served on the IPRA Board or an active IPRA committee (31% from survey)
 - b. Increases in weekly website visits and traffic geared toward all pages (16% visit weekly or more from survey)
 - c. IPRA membership increases for those with under 5 years of experience, including students, by 10 percent over 3 years (21% from survey)
- ii. Secondary measures to consider for development and tracking:
 - a. Increases in percentage of membership that feel informed on IPRA support activities
 - b. Increases in the percentage of members from outside central Iowa.
 - c. More member use of online communication methods provided by IPRA.

Kick-off: Develop dashboard to monitor strategy

Use strategic plan steering committee to specify dashboard features; identify baseline and targets by July 2017

Connect to IT consultant or other IT expertise to set up dashboard (work with technology task force—see "Sustain")

Launch dashboard by October 2018

Let's get started!






Success Looks Like...

- Data dashboard with metrics for regular assessment of the plan

Summary of Success—Year One



 SUSTAIN	 INFORM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technology needs assessment launched
UNITE		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Growth of legislative committee; legislative agenda under development
	GROW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinated university outreach effort underway• Regional rendezvous outside of Central Iowa expands by two by March 2018
TRACK		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalize desired dashboard features; coordinate with tech assessment

