

**THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT:
AN INDEPENDENT APPRAISAL OF ITS FORM AND FUNCTION
A SYNOPSIS OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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This report is the result of the commitment of time and talent on the part of a number of dedicated people.

Research and writing:

Project Coordinator and Co-author--Toni Hartrich, Civic Federation Director of Research

Co-authors from Grant Thornton Management Consulting--Neville Dowell, Senior Manager; Judy Erwin, Director of Local Government Services; and Gary Rose, Senior Consultant

Co-author--Myer Blank, Civic Federation Senior Research Associate

Project Research Assistants--Dylan Calsyn and Lowell Rice

Additional assistance in project design, review and recommendations was provided by the Project Peer Review Team:

James Colley, Director of Park, Recreation and Library Department, Phoenix Arizona; William Garrett, Director of Personnel for Montgomery County, Maryland; Richard Grodsky, Superintendent of Recreation, Evanston, Illinois; Donald Haider, Professor, J.L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University; Bonnie Noble, Director of Peoria Illinois Park and Forest Preserve District; Webbs Norman, Executive Director, Rockford Illinois Park District; David Phillips, Vice President, Speer Financial Inc.; Charles Pounian, Senior Consultant, The Hay Group; David Schulz, Director of Northwestern University Infrastructure Institute; William Stafford, Executive Director of Illinois Government Finance Officers Association; and, Herbye White, Director of Seattle Washington Park Department Central District.

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William P. Cowhey, President, The Civic Federation

THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT: AN INDEPENDENT APPRAISAL OF ITS FORM AND FUNCTION

A SYNOPSIS OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study resulted from a sense of concern expressed in the Fall of 1992 and Winter of 1993 by members of the civic community, the Chicago Park District (CPD), City Hall and average Chicagoans who wanted to look closer at the delivery of services of the Chicago Park District. The Civic Federation, as Chicago's oldest non-partisan civic group, was asked by the Chairman of the City Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation, the Chairman of the CPD Board of Commissioners, the CPD General Superintendent and the Mayor to undertake this study. Because of the Civic Federation's long history of reviewing the efficiency of local government operations, including those of the CPD, and because of the support of various government leaders and private groups interested in parks and recreation, the Federation accepted the challenge and embarked on a three month review of the CPD.

It has been over five years since the CPD began its experiment with a decentralized model for the delivery of park and recreation services through the creation of smaller park clusters. The Federation was asked to review how well this system was functioning, how well staff and resources were allocated, how the central administration and park level responsibilities were being carried out, and how the park system could most effectively meet the needs of Chicago's residents.

This report could not have been accomplished without the absolute cooperation and assistance of the CPD staff, the Mayor's staff and the critical support and expert advice from a team of external park, finance and management and personnel experts. The assistance of Grant Thornton's local government consultant unit was also key to the study. Grant Thornton reviewed the overall governance and organizational structure of the CPD for this study and made recommendations for improvements in these two crucial areas.

The Federation interviewed top CPD central administrators and local park staff, visited parks and programs throughout the city and the Federation (with City and CPD assistance) conducted a survey of major park systems across the country. We also reviewed numerous CPD documents and studies as well as other relevant materials in order to pinpoint problems and opportunities for improvement within the system. We tested our observations and analysis on the peer review team members and incorporated their suggestions into our recommendations. Although the overall report suggests major changes in the way that the CPD conducts its business and is fairly critical of the district's overall performance, it includes positive observations as well.

POSITIVE OBSERVATIONS

It cannot be stressed enough that the level of cooperation with this project by the CPD staff was outstanding. Anything we needed, whether it was a particular study or interviews with specific staff, was supplied to us in a thorough and timely fashion. The professionalism we observed during this process was impressive. People tended to be open and helpful throughout.

- We found some very strong park staff and wonderful programs within the system. It seems that these programs exist more in spite of the system than because of it. However, they do exist. There are many dedicated people working for the CPD who, because they care so much for the parks, do whatever is necessary to provide relevant, quality park services.
- The CPD has, over the past few years, made tremendous strides in improving its facilities and grounds citywide. Our park observers, who went into many of the neighborhood parks, were very impressed with the new soft surface playlots, renovated buildings and clean, well landscaped grounds.
- While we observed many systemic problems, it is extremely important to note that the people we interviewed were generally aware of the extent and nature of these problems. These staffers were very concerned about the shortcomings and appeared quite willing to work to improve the system. However, significant reform will not be possible without the commitment of the leadership of the highest officials in the CPD.
- CPD executives have also shown courage in identifying problems and moving to remedy rather than ignore them. For example, the problems with the initial Kellogg Initiative were insurmountable. Rather than sweep the situation under the rug, the General Superintendent commissioned an honest no-holds-barred evaluation of the initiative. When this evaluation was completed and offered major recommendations for change in this project, the General Superintendent and the CPD staff embraced these recommendations and moved to implement them. The new direction of this initiative has influenced some of our recommendations and provides many key elements necessary to have meaningful public input in the local parks.

MAJOR PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

We identified deficiencies throughout the CPD, from the highest levels of authority down to the individual worker within the parks. These problems are systemic and tinkering at the edges of the system will not solve them. Specifically, we found:

- Although the parks were officially decentralized in 1988, the process has not been totally achieved. Instead, we observed a dysfunctional operation which is a hybrid of a very centralized command format with a decentralized service delivery structure.
- There is a very unresponsive bureaucratic culture throughout the system, a lack of methodical monitoring of programs and staff performance and few built-in controls.
- There is a lack of communication and productive interaction among individuals, departments and programs within the agency as well as with park users, advisory councils, and the public at large.
- Decision making is top down, often lacking the needed input from those who have to implement the policies or those who are most affected by them.
- This system is not set up to adequately service its customers or potential patrons. It is inflexible, with little ability to adapt to the desires or needs of Chicagoans.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important recommendation in our study, is that the CPD should move to complete the decentralization of the park system. With the significant number of local parks and park facilities throughout Chicago's neighborhoods and the major regional and historic parks which serve the entire Chicago community, and the metropolitan region, we are convinced that the decentralized system will be the most effective way of connecting the potential and current park users with the park system and providing the best mix of services for them.

To accomplish this it will be essential to dismantle the current *unproductive work culture* at the park district-- especially the top down, non-inclusive management and decision making practices. This must be replaced with a system which involves all levels of staff in the decisions which affect them and their jobs. A park supervisor, for example, should be making the final decision on the staff needed to provide programs in the individual park, who will direct these programs and how program dollars will be distributed at that park. Everyone who works within the CPD must feel they have a stake and a pride of ownership in the CPD and its services.

Throughout the report these themes are emphasized. The recommendations that follow are grouped in several major areas:

- I: **Effective Park Management Structure**
- II: **Personnel, Labor Issues and Training**
- III: **Creating a Cohesive Budget Process**
- IV: **Park and Cluster Level Changes and Innovations**

I. EFFECTIVE PARK MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

BOARD ROLE AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

The Chicago Park District, like others in Illinois is a separate unit of local government which is overseen by an unpaid board of commissioners.¹ The CPD Board is made up of seven members and is the overall policy making body of the park district. Its main functions include overseeing and establishing the larger policy directions of the district, hiring and supervising the General Superintendent, ensuring that resource allocations (the budget) reflect its overall policy directives, setting tax and fee levels and acting as the legislative body for the district.

The General Superintendent should be the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the CPD and should carry out the policy directives established by the Board through managing the day to day operation of the CPD. It is easy for the boards of such governmental units to fall into a pattern of spending an inordinate amount of their time on day to day operations issues and as a result not spending enough time on the larger policy direction and oversight which their role requires. In its role as supervisor of the General Superintendent, the CPD Board should hold the General Superintendent accountable for carrying out the necessary directives in order to make the Board's policies reality. It is important that the CPD Board attend to these larger policy making functions and that its members resist the natural temptation to be drawn into the day to day management of the district.

DECENTRALIZATION

In 1987, the Chicago Park District initiated a decentralization program, the objective of which was to put much of the decision making authority previously exercised by the central administration at the park and cluster level. Successful decentralization would require that accountability for results is required of those who carry out the functions. The CPD has not been successful in its decentralization but has established a fairly ineffective hybrid of a centralized and decentralized system. Real authority was not decentralized yet a second more local administrative layer was added with the creation of the clusters. While both public officials and the unions would no doubt agree that the CPD is subject to too much bureaucratic control, the remedial action they take serves only to aggravate the situation. This is further exacerbated by the fact that there is a considerable amount of resistance to decentralization from some managers within

¹ Generally, in Illinois these are elected boards of commissioners, not appointed. The CPD is the exception in this respect. It's Board is appointed by the Mayor of Chicago with ratification by the City Council. Across the country, park and recreation services within counties or municipalities tend to be run by city or county departments.

the system who fear that further decentralization may have an adverse effect on their careers. If decentralization is to be successful, staff at all levels must agree and support it.

The decentralization that was started in 1987 should be taken further. However, the entire process should be carefully handled to ensure that implementation is open, timely, and professional. Objectives include:

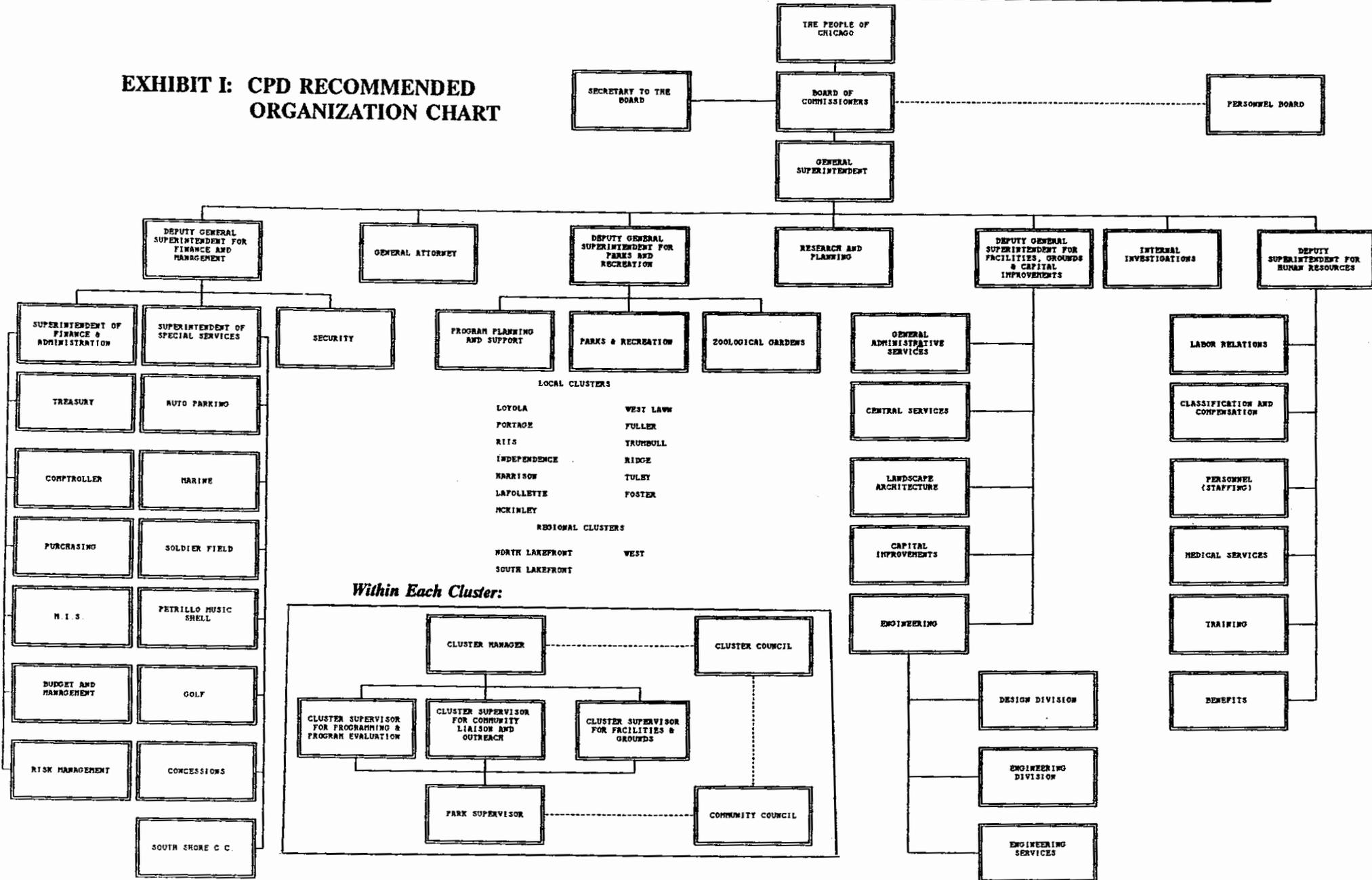
- The functions that are being decentralized should be clearly identified to leave no doubt about the line of responsibility. Clear standards should be established and an evaluation system implemented to hold staff accountable for their progress in achieving stated goals and objectives.
- Whenever responsibility is decentralized, the commensurate authority should be conferred and a system of accountability be established.
- The resources necessary to adequately perform the decentralized functions should be clearly identified and made available to those performing these functions.

To ensure that the above principles are adhered to, the decentralization process should be conducted in a systematic manner, with each participant in the process working within the same framework of analysis. The General Superintendent should spearhead this process or appoint a senior manager to "champion" it.

IMMEDIATE STEPS TOWARD DECENTRALIZATION

Exhibit I sets out an organization chart incorporating the organizational changes which we believe should be made immediately. These changes will not necessitate additional funding by the CPD but will require a reallocation of existing funds. If the suggested changes are implemented, a firm time frame should be established to monitor progress.

EXHIBIT I: CPD RECOMMENDED ORGANIZATION CHART



STREAMLINE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSIBILITIES AS CEO

The General Superintendent as the CEO of the Chicago Park District should focus on the major management and policy issues of the CPD. Currently the General Superintendent has two deputy general superintendents, two superintendents and nine other departments or offices reporting directly to him. To shore up the position of the General Superintendent as the leader of this large government entity, it is important to streamline the lines of reporting within the CPD. To accomplish this, our proposed organizational structure includes four deputy general superintendents and three offices which report directly to the General Superintendent.

In addition to these changes, we suggest that some functions which are currently performed by service departments or groups reporting directly to the General Superintendent should, in view of their importance to the CPD as a whole, be moved into the Office of the General Superintendent. These functions are:

- **Intergovernmental Relations**

Intergovernmental relations are presently coordinated by the Director of Intergovernmental Affairs who is part of the External Affairs Department. We are recommending that the External Affairs Department be disbanded. Most of the functions of this Department can be performed at the Park and Cluster level as explained later, but we feel the potential impact of governmental legislation upon the CPD warrants this particular function being handled by the General Superintendent's office. In addition, the formation of the CPD's legislative agenda should be formed at the highest level.

Also, the CPD currently interacts with approximately 50 other governmental agencies. This interaction is critical to the success of many co-sponsored events and activities. These events need to be coordinated at a high-level even though much of the actual work is done by many departments.

- **Grant Procurement**

Grant procurement has the potential to be a significant source of funds and must be aggressively pursued. The General Superintendent's personal involvement in this effort enhances the likelihood of success.

- **Marketing**

Steps must be taken to remedy commonly held negative perceptions of CPD programs and services through

aggressive marketing of city-wide functions and promoting a positive image for the CPD. Heralding CPD accomplishments and overall marketing of city-wide programs appears to be duplicated in several departments. We recommend that these efforts be focused in the General Superintendent's office. Public perception of the CPD is of a bureaucratic non-responsive entity. Steps must be taken to remedy this common perception while concurrently taking corrective action on the underlying causes of ineffectiveness and inefficiency. However, local program marketing should be handled at the park and cluster level.

The Internal Investigations Department, General Attorney's Office and the Research and Planning Department will continue to report directly to the General Superintendent. Internal Investigations will continue to perform its inspector general type functions but its human resources related functions will be transferred to the new Human Resources Division. The Research and Planning Department should be expanded and should add strategic planning as well as maintenance, evaluation and analysis of park and recreation statistics to its present functions.

GROUP RELEVANT FUNCTIONS MORE LOGICALLY

We suggest altering several of the deputy general superintendents' titles to better reflect their duties. In addition, the following changes have been proposed to group functions more logically:

- *The Deputy General Superintendent for Human Resources* is a new position which has responsibility for all Human Resources issues. Some departments which currently report directly to the General Superintendent logically belong in this new division, including Labor Relations and the Department of Employment. The major functions of the Department of Employment will be put into the Personnel (staffing) Unit. Human resources functions currently performed by the Internal Investigations Department (drug testing and employment fitness testing) will report to the Human Resources Division. The personnel function is a critical factor and deserves high priority. This Deputy General Superintendent will become a focal point for all personnel issues and have a direct line of communication with the General Superintendent.
- The office of the *Deputy General Superintendent for Human Resources* will also be liable for Equal Employment Opportunities and Affirmative Action programs.
- The Medical Department has been moved to Human Resources, as many of the functions performed by this department logically fall here.

- *The Deputy General Superintendent for Facilities, Grounds and Capital Improvements is a new position which combines the duties of the former Superintendent of Central Services and C.I.P. and Superintendent of Engineering and Landscape Management. By combining these two positions, we reduce the number of positions reporting directly to the General Superintendent. The individual departments and their roles have not changed with the exception that Landscape Management will be handled at the cluster level with responsibility given to the cluster supervisor for facilities and grounds management. Landscape Architecture will still be controlled centrally.*

In addition, we propose that the General Administrative Services Department should report here with the exception of the property control function. Property control should be handled by the Budget and Management Department. The rationale for centralizing whatever printing functions remaining at the central administration is similar to the rationale for centralizing the significant maintenance and engineering projects. The management issues in responding to user department needs is similar and so it seems logical that this department be in the new division.

- We recommend placing Budget Management under the control of the Deputy General Superintendent of Finance and Administration rather than reporting directly to the General Superintendent. Under this scenario, the Department of Budget and Management should support the operating managers by providing information and analysis on a scheduled basis. This department should also support the parks and other operating entities at budget time by providing guidance, historical costs, and technical expertise.
- We recommend that the Risk Management Department stay under the control of the Deputy Superintendent for Finance and Management, with the exception of the workers' compensation component of Risk Management. Risk management requires a team approach with input from the General Attorney's office, Human Resources and Finance and Management. This team approach would better manage the overall risk exposure of the CPD.

The workers' compensation component of the Risk Management Department logically belongs in the Benefits Unit under the new Human Resources Division.

- Research and Evaluation is a one-person department created in 1993 reporting to the Deputy Superintendent for Parks and Recreation. This function would be better combined with the Research and Planning department which reports directly to the General Superintendent.

COMMENCE IMPLEMENTATION OF FURTHER DECENTRALIZATION

- **The role of Deputy General Superintendent for Parks and Recreation remains significant. It will retain overall responsibility for the parks and recreation programs. This position is critical to the success of the CPD and of decentralization since this area has direct line responsibility for meeting the goals of the agency. The local parks will have a greater amount of authority and responsibility in a decentralized environment. This position will provide guidance and direction to the parks in addition to monitoring their performance.**
- **Program Planning and Support reports to the Deputy General Superintendent for Parks and Recreation. Because the clusters and parks themselves should assume more responsibility for developing their own programming to meet the needs of their clients, some of the personnel presently in this department should be moved to the cluster level. The restructured department will exist to assist the parks with technical expertise and training as needed and concentrate more on the support function than planning and development.**
- **Community outreach should be handled at the cluster level and thus eliminate the need for a separate Community Outreach Department.**
- **Community marketing for park programs should be decentralized to the cluster level by redistributing the personnel currently in the Communications Department to the clusters, except for the employees currently responsible for District-wide promotions. They should be transferred to the General Superintendent's Office.**
- **The Management Information Systems (MIS) in the CPD must be updated to provide the necessary information required to successfully manage a decentralized operation. The crucial areas to be addressed include budget preparation and reporting, work order management and human resources management. The CPD currently has a consulting firm evaluating the MIS system. Management must work closely with the consulting firm to ensure the recommendations will meet the CPD's information requirements and also that the dollars will be appropriately allocated.**

II. PERSONNEL, LABOR ISSUES, AND TRAINING²

In order for the Chicago Park District to efficiently deliver services to the community, a strong personnel system is necessary. Problems that have resulted from the present system include:

- Park activities are curtailed because staff vacancies are not filled.
- Employee morale is low, as an abnormally high percentage of employees file grievances.
- Notices of termination have been sent to employees who are not at risk of losing their jobs.

For example, often personnel who have not received adequate training are placed in supervisory positions. One reason is that current requirements in the job classifications and job descriptions do not reflect the current service delivery needs of the system. Park supervisors are required to manage personnel and maintain their parks but are not required to have the necessary training and additional education in parks management and parks administration. Rather, they mostly have on the job experience in recreation programs and supervising recreation staff.

The CPD must develop a better personnel process to ensure that the best possible people are hired, held accountable for their performance and given the training and support they need to thrive in their jobs. If the system makes it difficult for people to do their jobs, provides few incentives to improve performance and creates a bureaucracy that entangles employees in red tape then service delivery suffers.

The personnel problems of the District mirror system-wide deficiencies. There is poor communication between the functions handling personnel issues, i.e., Labor Relations, the Department of Employment, the General Attorney's Office, managers in the field, and the unions. Rarely, if ever, do these groups get together to solve problems. As a result of this poor communication, it is virtually impossible to figure out who or which department is ultimately held accountable for most major personnel decisions. Blame is shifted from one department to another or spread so thin throughout the system that rarely is anyone brought to task for a mistake.

² This section was written with the assistance of Charles A. Pounian, Senior Consultant, The Hay Group, and William P. Garrett, Director of Personnel, Montgomery County, Maryland.

PERSONNEL ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

The Department of Employment was singled out in our interviews as the most problem-ridden, not only in the area of operations but also in poor communications with the various departments and local parks. However, this department is not solely responsible for handling personnel issues. Based on our interviews and other recent studies of the CPD, we have identified four other departments which have responsibility for portions of the CPD's personnel function: Labor Relations, General Attorney's Office, Internal Investigations, and Medical Services.

In our analysis of personnel functions, we have identified ten areas that need to be addressed. The following is a list of these areas and our recommendations for major initiatives within each:

NEW HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION

- The CPD should replace its current personnel-related structure with a new Human Resources Division.
- The new Deputy Superintendent for Human Resources should have responsibility for the administration of the classification and compensation plans.
- The new Deputy Superintendent for Human Resources should organize a representative committee of employees throughout the District to evaluate all current job titles and classifications.

CLASSIFICATION AND COMPENSATION

- The Personnel Board should be limited to the review of disciplinary actions rather than the *administration* of the classification and compensation programs.
- The number of titles in the job classification system should be reduced from 400 to approximately 150.
- Salaries for career employees should include skill development and career longevity incentives.
- To encourage career development, various skill levels within each classification should be identified. A minimum and maximum salary level for each class should be established and intermediate salary steps should relate to skill levels within each class.

- Wages for part-time employees should be commensurate with skills required.
- A wage survey should be conducted to make sure that CPD salaries are competitive.

LABOR/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

- There is a need for better communication between the CPD and labor representatives regarding changes in personnel policy before they become effective.
- The practice of using employees to work out of classification must be closely monitored by the Human Resources Division and must become the exception rather than the rule.

EMPLOYMENT

- Job descriptions should contain two components:
 - Generic responsibilities and skill requirements of the classification
 - A description of specific tasks for the position tailored to the individual clusters, parks, and/or departmental requirements
- Managers should have primary responsibility for selecting their own staff. The personnel function should only operate as a central resource and to provide support in the hiring process.

DISCIPLINE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- All employees must be held accountable for their performance and behavior.
- Managers must be trained in personnel administration as well as in the application of labor contracts and disciplining of employees.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

- Performance evaluations should be designed to create an environment that furthers employee development, enhances service delivery, and ensures accountability.

- Managers must be accountable for improving employee performance through good supervision and regular feedback to employees including, but not limited to, 6-month performance evaluations.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- The CPD should provide employees with management training and incentives as they advance through the system.
- The CPD should provide financial support and encourage employees to enroll in continuing education courses and pursue college and advanced degrees.

TRAINING

- Training should become an integral part of each employee's job responsibilities and be promulgated throughout the agency as a benefit to encourage improvement and greater productivity.
- Training programs should address management, team building, and employee issues.
- All supervisors should receive comprehensive training in areas such as communications, team building, performance management, progressive discipline, labor-management relations, and interviewing techniques.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) should be managed by a network separate from the CPD. A Request for Proposals should be sent out to qualified bidders.

PERSONNEL COMPONENT OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

- There needs to be an integrated management information system (MIS) that combines payroll, benefits, and staffing.
- The new Human Resources Division's portion of the upgraded MIS should be linked with budget & finance, work orders and facility management, and programming.

CONCLUSION

With the advent of decentralization, the focus on service delivery now centers on each park. Given the number of clusters and parks, it is both difficult and inefficient for the central personnel staff to monitor every potential disciplinary problem in the field. If decentralization is going to work, supervisors have to be held accountable and be given the responsibility for the personnel under their direction. They must be clearly advised that the supervision of employees is part of their job. A crucial aspect of this empowerment will be allowing park supervisors to hire personnel who will meet the needs of their parks. In order to reinforce this concept, promotions, bonuses, and even job security must clearly be linked to the handling of personnel by local level supervisors.

Although this is a major shift in work culture for most supervisors in the field, any hesitancy to create full accountability measures will result in prolonging current inefficiencies. Therefore, supervisors need to be trained and supported as they grow into this new culture of accountability.

Training supervisors before they are faced with a disciplinary crisis can prevent many of the grievance problems the CPD has experienced in the past. If managers are allowed to supervise their employees, develop their own skills as well as the skills of their staff, and hire the personnel they think they need to meet their parks' individual needs, the CPD will be on its way to becoming one of the best park systems in the nation.

III. CREATING A COHESIVE BUDGET PROCESS

The current budget is not the most important problem in the district, but improving the document and budget process would help improve the overall operation. It could also help break down the bureaucratic culture of the agency and give the field staff and the community a bigger stake in the system. It is one area where immediate improvements can be realized if there is sincere commitment by the park leadership.

Over the past eight to ten years, with the exception of the preparation of the 1993 budget, the Chicago Park District has followed a fairly simplistic budget process. In these earlier years, department heads, cluster managers, and upper level management were involved in the budget process. The level of the district involved in this process tended to be the cluster managers, who were asked to submit local cluster budgets but in fact were given little maneuvering room in their allocation choices.³

In 1993, although the form of the document was unchanged, the budget process was even less inclusive than usual. The initial budget was produced with the input of only a few top officials in the district. The reasons cited most often for this unusual process were, first of all, the need to deeply cut budget and staff because City leaders strenuously opposed a property tax increase for the park district and, secondly, the on-going contract negotiations with CPD's labor unions. Many leaders in the district who traditionally were part of the process were disheartened by this "restricted" 1993 budget process and saw it as a symbol of the purposeful exclusion of staff from major district decisions. It is illustrative that the district took this tack in a time of fiscal constraint. As many of the budget and park experts we contacted stated, it is in just such times where it is most important to be inclusive in the decision process.

It should also be noted that even in normal budget years, under the Chicago Park District's current "decentralized structure", local park supervisors and park advisory councils are not included in the budget process. In fact, in many clusters, local park supervisors are not even told what is included in their own budgets. The other park districts contacted through the course of this study highlighted the importance of starting the budget process at the bottom and moving up to the top. This sharply contrasts with the CPD's top down approach.

³ One reason these choices were limited was a 1983 settlement of a lawsuit between the Chicago Park District and the U.S. Government which resulted in strict formulas to better distribute park resources. The case centered on the long history of alleged discriminatory distribution of resources within the District. An implementation committee was put in place to insure that the system would redress the earlier problems. This decree expired in 1989, but the Chicago Park District has committed itself to continuing this effort. A second reason for inflexibility was that the constraint put on local programming decisions of parks by the central administration forcing all parks to offer the same basic programs.

OVERALL CRITERIA FOR A GOOD BUDGET

The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) has established several basic criteria for an effective budget document. They define an effective budget as:

- *A POLICY DOCUMENT* in which the government unit's current policies are explained and new policies are proposed.
- *AN OPERATIONS GUIDE* for the system which provides such information as organizational structure, departmental responsibilities and program/departmental objectives and performance measures.
- *A FINANCIAL PLAN* which presents information on financial issues that will facilitate planning for allocating expenditure priorities between programs and for more than just a one year time frame.
- *A COMMUNICATIONS MEDIUM* which is part of an open public process, making information available to board members, those within the system, the media and private citizens in an easily understandable format. The budget document should clearly define the system, its programs, its challenges and its accomplishments.

We would add to this basic list for the CPD:

- *AN INCLUSIVE BOTTOM-UP BUDGET PROCESS* where basic resource allocation decisions are made by those who are responsible for providing the services and programming.
- *A LINKED STRATEGIC PLANNING AND BUDGET PROCESS* where the goals and objectives at every level in the system are linked to the budget and are included in the document.

It will be important for the Park District's leaders to commit to changing the budget over the next several years by:

- Creating a performance based budget over a three year period
- Bringing the budget process down to the park level and moving to a bottom up budget planning system
- Connecting strategic planning, goals and management objectives with the budget at all levels of the system

- Developing the budget document into an effective communication tool for the district and its programs
- Linking long term capital needs with the budget by developing external and internal capital priorities in a long range capital expenditure improvement plan that is linked to resource dollars.

RECOMMENDED BUDGET CHANGES

The CPD should revise its budget document format to be more consistent with GFOA standards and better reflect the decentralized park structure. This can be done effectively through a four volume budget document.

Volume I would include the executive summary, an overview of the budget and the transmittal letter from the General Superintendent. This volume would explain major focuses and innovations; highlight trends in programs, expenditures and revenues; explain the park's mission and set major goals and objectives; discuss the last year's accomplishments and major problems or issues which the system needs to address. It should also include some summary tables; charts of total revenues and expenditures; personnel staffing levels broken out for the central administration, clusters and parks; statistics on the park programs and the overall system; an organizational chart and a short explanation of the budget process.

Volume II would include specific central administration budget detail and detail for any park functions which are city-wide in nature (such as the museums, special events, and Soldier Field).

Volume III would include the budgets for the clusters and the individual parks within each one. This section would be organized by cluster with cluster-wide information for cluster-wide functions followed by individual park budget breakdowns for each staffed park within the cluster.

Volume IV would be the annual update of the long range (Three to Five Year) Capital Improvement Plan. This volume would not focus on maintenance or regular repairs, but would instead include the long term development projects and major renovation plans of the district. It would show the timelines for accomplishing these projects, the priorities for the various projects and the revenue streams already dedicated, needed or anticipated for these projects.

Detail within the budget documents should include several years of historical data for revenues (such as fees generated by park programs), for expenditures, for staff levels, estimated totals for current year and projected totals for the budget

year. For example, in the 1994 budget document there should be FY91 and FY92 actual figures, FY93 estimated figures and FY94 projected figures.

Departmental, cluster and park sections should each include overall summaries of their programs and or mission statements with pertinent data and program statistics as well as goals and management objectives. Also each section should detail how well the individual department, cluster or park met its prior year's goals and objectives or priorities. Workload measures and/or performance measures should be included in these sections. A staff profile for each of these breakdown sections is important as well.

The process of grassroots, bottom up strategic planning and priority setting will be facilitated through the development of park, cluster and departmental level goals and objectives for service delivery that are included in the budget document. Developing an accountability system that includes performance measurement can help the managers throughout the park district begin to connect budgeting, management planning and resource allocation decisions. Another important element of a performance or program type of budget process is the institution of cost center accounting. This would allow the CPD to identify total costs and revenues associated with a particular program or function.

Developing sound program goals, objectives and performance measures is the most difficult part of a performance based budget system. Managers have to change the way they view both the budget process and planning, and they will need help and training. Good measures are not developed overnight, and it may take several years to develop them. However, the district can and should begin this process now because the rewards of better planning and a more accountable budget format and process outweigh any short term adjustment problems.

It is important that the strategic planning process also be revisited. This time it should be connected directly to the budget process, and should involve staff at all levels not just the top managers.

Reforming the budget and budget process, although not the most critical problem, is essential for meaningful decentralization within the park system. It is an opportunity to help move away from the current stagnant and bureaucratic culture or mentality and energize the staff so that line personnel have a greater stake in the overall system and its services. It also will help improve the public perception of the CPD and can be a clarion call that things are changing for the better.

IV: PARK AND CLUSTER LEVEL STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND INNOVATIONS

The most important components of the Chicago Park District are the individual parks and the park programs. The current system includes 13 neighborhood park clusters with between 11 and 26 staffed parks facilities within each cluster and three additional regional park clusters: South (Grant, Burnham, Jackson and Washington Parks); North (Lincoln Park); and West (Garfield, Douglas, Humboldt, and Columbus Parks).

Our analysis confirmed that there is a wide variation in quality and level of services within the different clusters and among individual parks. We saw some very successful and well run park programs, some average ones and several appallingly poor ones. Overall, we found that staff morale was quite low both in the well run and the not so well run parks.

COMMON THEMES

- Lack of involvement of the people in the field in the decision making process. This is true even in those cases where individuals in the field were directly affected by these decisions. The local park and cluster staff are being held accountable for delivering quality park programs yet are not given adequate support, authority or clear guidelines for this role.
- The people in these decentralized management jobs (cluster park manager, cluster park supervisor, park supervisor and playground supervisor) almost exclusively have been promoted through the recreation track. This is a very insulated system. Although there may be some managers with relevant advanced degrees or special park management training, this appears to be rare.

When the CPD moved to the decentralized cluster system, the job classifications for the new staff positions were generally designed around current staff and based on the historic staffing policies. These policies highly favored the line personnel from the recreation programming side of the park system without regard to whether this recreation training prepared these people for new job functions.

We have a series of recommendations for finetuning park and cluster functions and the staffing structure. The remainder of this section will focus on these recommendations for:

- Strengthening the individual cluster and park management staffing and responsibilities

- **Bolstering community input through more structured community councils**
- **Utilizing role models and suggestions culled from other districts and from exceptional programs within the CPD itself for the use of volunteers, marketing, fee structures, needs assessments, program evaluation, innovative programs, cooperative ventures and incentives to encourage innovation.**

CLUSTER AND PARK STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS

To better serve park users and to move responsibility and decision making down to the local level, it is essential to give cluster managers and supervisory staff the power to make decisions about their resource allocations, staff hiring and firing, and personnel evaluation as well as control over the cluster and park programming, planning, annual work plans, marketing, facilities maintenance and grounds upkeep.

It will also be important to develop better guidelines to distribute staff and resources within the park system and to modify the implementation formulas which have been established to carry out the spirit of the CPD and U.S. Government's 1983 Consent Decree. This lawsuit was over the equitable distribution of park resources so as to better reflect park usage, facilities and acreage as well as variations in programming needs across the city. This can be done fairly while still maintaining an equitable distribution of resources throughout the city. It is important to allow for creativity and encourage diversity in the programming offered. The current formulas used to determine programming and the distribution of park resources among the clusters do not guarantee adequate distribution of resources. This is especially true for grounds and facilities management where the staffing structure bears little relationship to physical needs for maintenance of the parks.

To reshape cluster management, we recommend that the cluster manager position description should reflect the type of skills and training required for a superintendent of a smaller park district.

Currently, two cluster supervisors who each have basically the same job description report to the cluster manager. This should be changed to three cluster supervisors who have distinct job descriptions:

- *Cluster Supervisor for Facilities and Grounds Management*
- *Cluster Supervisor for Programming and Program Evaluation*
- *Cluster Supervisor for Community Liaison and Outreach*

These all would be management positions. The current duties of the trades coordinator and the operations supervisor positions in each cluster would be subsumed into the *cluster supervisor for facilities and grounds management*. The cluster supervisor would also have an assistant supervisor to assist in fulfilling this combined role. The cluster supervisor should:

- Oversee the grounds and facilities within the cluster
- Monitor landscaping, trades, and maintenance activities and functions

Under the revised structure, the *cluster supervisor for programming and program evaluation* would be responsible for oversight, monitoring, and program support to the various park supervisors within the cluster. Of the three recommended cluster supervisor positions, the *cluster supervisor for programming and program evaluation* is the most similar to the existing cluster supervisor position.

The *cluster supervisor for community liaison and outreach* should have similar qualifications to those required for the two community outreach development positions in the revised Kellogg Program Initiative Project. This initiative involves two pilot cluster programs where the advisory councils are being evaluated, advisory training is being provided and more effective advisory council structures are being tested.

Marketing and outreach functions should be decentralized down to the cluster level. The park supervisor and community volunteers on councils need support, training and monitoring to successfully fulfill their marketing roles. This supervisor would fulfill these support and training roles. Similar to the temporary position of Community Coordinator in the Kellogg study, this permanent supervisor position requires the types of specialized skills of a community organizer who can not only identify community leaders and community institutions but also develop effective community relations programs.

Park supervisors will need to have the experience and training necessary to manage their facilities, staff and programs in their parks. They need much more than recreation experience to carry out these responsibilities. They should be able to put together their annual work plan for their park in conjunction with their community councils, choose and supervise their park staff, perform regular staff and program evaluations, as well as, oversee their individual park budgets.

It will be essential for all the local managers to have access to the requisite support and training to carry out these more inclusive responsibilities if a decentralized system is to work well. Under such a system, *park supervisors* and *cluster managers* would get much of the power they have been asking for. But they also will become accountable for their own actions and the programs and staff they oversee.

THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY COUNCILS AND MORE INSTITUTIONALIZED COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Another key structural component within the decentralized system is the community based council which should have substantial input in local park planning, resource allocation and staffing. The current loosely structured advisory council system is very uneven in the quality of the individual councils and the assistance they give to the local park. This component was not well planned when decentralization was instituted citywide in 1988. As is eloquently explained in the 1992 *Review of Kellogg Program Initiative Study*, this aspect of local control needs major overhaul. Since we have recommended that more of the major program and resource allocation decisions should be put at the local level, it is very important to have a sound council design.

Our recommendations flow from the 1992 *Review of the Kellogg Program Initiative Study* conducted for the CPD in 1992. However, we will be more specific in our recommendations about the makeup and selection process for these councils.

- Local *community councils* should include community leaders representing the major institutional actors in the community served by the individual park.
- The *community councils* also should include representatives from the programs which are emphasized in that local park.

The *cluster supervisor for community liaison and outreach* is essential in setting up effective *community councils* that reflect the neighborhood around each park. This cluster supervisor would work with the *park supervisor* to identify the major community institutions around the individual park and set up a system for these groups to choose their own representatives to the *community council*.⁴ For example, representatives might come from:

- Local chamber of commerce
- Local religious institutions
- Local public schools
- Local youth service agencies
- Local private and parochial schools
- Teen program participants
- Community based organizations
- Adult program participants
- Other social service agencies or agency networks
- The families of students in special programs

⁴ For the three regional clusters, the community council set up would be slightly different. It would include the consideration that these are regional parks which, in many cases, have a broader constituency than the immediate neighborhood and that their councils would need to adequately reflect this.

The *cluster supervisor for community liaison and outreach* should:

- Conduct an initial community institutional and leadership assessment
- Make a plan for participant structure for each park in the cluster
- Oversee annual *community council* selection process
- Offer training support for *community council* members and *park supervisors* several times a year

In the first year, the *cluster supervisor for community liaison and outreach* should establish the *community councils* in the five largest parks in the cluster. In the next year, the supervisor should establish the councils in the next largest seven or eight parks. The remainder of the councils should be established in the third year. The *cluster supervisor for community liaison and outreach* should review the individual councils every few years to be sure they represent the current mix of community institutions and recommend any necessary adjustments to the local council structure.

There also should be a *cluster-wide council*⁵ with representatives from each *community council* in every cluster. Once cluster-wide and park councils are established, it will be possible to have much more shared decision making between the councils and *cluster manager (cluster-wide councils)* or *park supervisors (community councils)*. The councils ideally should be partners in the workplan design, hiring and evaluating the *park supervisor*, and local resource allocation decisions in the annual budget process.

EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIONS THAT THE CPD COULD USE

INCREASED VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

Volunteers acting to supplement park operations are very common throughout park systems across the country. Other urban park systems have developed a variety of effective and imaginative roles for volunteers. For example:

- In Peoria, civic groups help with staff evaluations. Also, it has a volunteer coordinator who recruits

⁵ In the case of the three regional clusters, there should be one regional council which includes representation from each of the parks in the three regional clusters.

volunteers to staff major park events, allowing regular park staff to provide uninterrupted programming in the neighborhood parks.

- In New York, volunteers are used extensively in all park operations including landscaping.
- In Evanston, volunteers advise on budgetary decisions and suggest priorities.
- In Phoenix and Rockford, volunteers help evaluate programming.

DIFFERENTIAL FEE STRUCTURES

Just as the effective use of volunteers helps encourage community participation and stretches park resources, an equitable fee system will increase park revenues while insuring that low income individuals have access to programs and facilities.

Three major questions are asked by other park and recreation systems to determine fees:

- *What is the quality and quantity of programming or facility usage?*

Many other park systems have established logical, standardized fee systems which reflect the level of service offered. The CPD should move toward a fee system which better reflect the level of service.

- *What is the ability to pay of the person to whom we are providing services?*

In New York, people are asked when they register with the park if they would like to double their membership fee and thereby participate in an adopt a member program. These extra dollars are then used to provide scholarships for low income residents who could not otherwise afford park district fees. Evanston and most other park systems we interviewed, had scholarship programs to help low income individuals pay park fees. The CPD should continue to recognize the needs of low income persons for recreational activities by standardizing the procedures whereby fees are waived.

- *Is the person who is receiving this service a resident of the park district?*

Many urban park systems we surveyed charge higher non-resident fees for the use of facilities and programs. This is equitable because the residents subsidize the parks through taxes, while the non-residents do not. Under the current CPD system, non-residents often utilize CPD facilities and

programs at no extra cost. This practice results in situations where Chicago residents are denied access to their local parks because of conflicts over space. A requirement that non-residents pay their fair share would put Chicago in line with most urban park systems across the country. In the case of outside groups, such as suburban sports leagues using park facilities, this should be coordinated so that it does not negatively impact on local resident access.

MARKETING INNOVATIONS

Developing an effective marketing strategy in a decentralized system is an important goal that the CPD has failed thus far to meet. Time and time again, we heard that it was difficult to market programs in communities because "everything had to go through central" in spite of the fact that there is a small allocation for each park to produce fliers and/or other park marketing. We also were informed that the central office has an exceptionally long turnaround time for printing and the resulting product often contains inaccuracies. Our interviews with managers in other park systems yielded a number of ideas for effective marketing of neighborhood parks and programs:

- In Peoria, each individual park has its own marketing budget. The park then can decide whether it wants to spend its marketing dollars on acquiring outside services, developing in house technologies, or utilizing the marketing-related central services provided by the park district.
- In Evanston, an attractive recreation guide, partially supported by local advertising, (as is also the case in Rockford and Wheeling), is distributed door to door quarterly. This guide describes classes, fees, and locations of park programming. In addition, the guide has information on advisory council meetings, a listing of all the individual parks and facilities, a calendar of special events, a registration form, information on park policies other city government information and a listing of affiliated groups.

The CPD's TQM project found that the Park District *creates little awareness of local park programming* and the implication has been *low levels of program participation may result from inadequate program awareness*.⁶ Information similar to that compiled in the TQM study is currently being gathered for two other clusters. This information will prove invaluable for cluster level marketing strategies system-wide. It is our suggestion that the pilot program be expanded so that relevant

⁶ *TQM Models of Excellence Project 3rd Quarter Management Presentation: Performance Measures of Local Programming*, 1992, p. VI-5. This project compiled information on attendance, program evaluation, community interests, effectiveness of program marketing, and community residents' ratings of park facilities for six parks in the study area.

data, such as that routinely collected in other park systems, be collected and made available to cluster level managers.

Finally, cluster level staff would do well to look toward the Rockford Park District for an example of how to develop an overall cluster marketing strategy. This district has developed marketing strategies for individual parks through a strategic planning process which emphasizes total community participation at all levels of decision making.

NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

Nearly all of the park experts from outside the CPD system who participated in our peer review process were surprised that CPD does not routinely conduct needs assessments in Chicago's neighborhoods in order to guide programming at individual parks. Our peer reviewers pointed out that a regular needs assessment process is accepted practice for park systems. While CPD may choose not to conduct a professional comprehensive needs assessment as in Peoria or Evanston, steps should be taken immediately toward developing such a procedure at each cluster.

At the very least, the CPD should expand its TQM pilot project to include all the clusters. These surveys were distributed to registrants of programs, at neighborhood schools and at community meetings in the TQM study area. These surveys showed that *substantial gaps between program registration and program interest do exist for physical activities and 'other' non-traditional Chicago Park District Programs.*⁷

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The initial TQM Project could serve also as a model for evaluating existing programs. Yet, if the CPD is serious about instituting a regular systematic approach to program evaluation, additional methods should be investigated.

A good model is Rockford's extensive program evaluation system. Individual parks in Rockford hold focus group meetings of eight to twelve people, do random sample telephone surveys, provide suggestion cards, and solicit college student volunteers to talk one on one with park users about services and levels of satisfaction.

PROGRAM INNOVATIONS

Concomitant with assessing needs and evaluating programs the CPD needs to explore innovative programming ideas.

⁷ *TQM Models of Excellence*, p. VI-3.

Overall, many high-level managers and field staff concur that the CPD is offering the same basic core program it did in the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, most of its current basic program structure can be traced back to the 1920s. To its credit, it has recently established a cooperative venture with Friends of the Parks and the Chicago Board of Education called "Kaleidoscope Kids". This highly successful afterschool program targets latch-key elementary school-aged children.

Although we found a few parks with exceptionally strong teen programs, in general, Chicago has not been attracting at-risk teenagers to its programs. Many other park systems have found innovative ways to target teenage youth and to secure funding for these programs which could serve as examples for Chicago:

- The City of Phoenix's Park, Recreation and Library Department has a very successful "Youth at Risk" program. Last year, field staff served over 1.7 million youth by collaborating with businesses, volunteers, school districts and social service agencies. The Director of the Department states that:

In the development of Youth at Risk Programs there should not be preset boundaries of operation. The Youth at Risk themselves need to be involved in determining programs and social services required in addition to recreation programs and funding should not be limited to one source.

- The Evanston "At Risk" program has proved highly successful as well. (See Appendix F-7) Last year, \$28,000 went to fund specific "At Risk" programs. Although the youth are referred to the parks by social service agencies, police, religious organizations and schools, Evanston states the success of the programming lies in the recruiting efforts and program assistance from park staff and volunteers. The use of volunteers in this program allows Evanston to stretch its program resources.
- The Peoria Park District hires teenagers in the summer for 20 hours per week and in turn gives them coupons to use park facilities free of charge in exchange for their labor. By providing sports equipment, the youth are given the opportunity to *exercise positive choices*. Also in Peoria, the Park District is beginning to contract with the local university, parents, and youth to establish an apprenticeship program to give at risk youth opportunities for park careers.
- Baltimore also has such a program that is well established. The program is designed to provide professional training for teenagers to prepare them for future employment or careers in recreation and parks. The program allows teenagers to work directly with recreation leaders based on their interests and backgrounds.

Many park systems offer programming to develop youth leadership skills:

- Minneapolis offers such programs for 12-16 year olds through its "Youthline" and "We Who Care" initiatives. These initiatives have programs in four major areas: Creative Expression, Life Skills Development, "Wish List" activities and Community Involvement.
- In Boston, the Youth Outreach Program sponsors youth-run organization in ten neighborhoods throughout the city. Teenagers organize events and activities and deal with issues that teenagers face in their daily lives.
- In the District of Rockford, an area-wide high school youth council raised \$300,000 to create a teenage playground which was funded, designed, and constructed by the teenagers themselves.

Other park and recreation systems have also explored innovative ways of funding youth programming:

- The Phoenix Park, Recreation and Library Department's summer program has been funded in part by money repossessed from drug sales by the police department.
- In the City of Portland, the Parks Department has created the "Youth Trust Fund Summer Program" which is funded by a small fee charged by Portland's four city-owned golf courses. This money is then distributed to community service organizations who provide youth targeted programming and services.

INCENTIVES FOR INNOVATIVE IDEAS AND PROGRAMS

Examples of such support can be found in several park and recreation systems which set aside special funds for innovative programs and in some which reward the park or staff involved for initiating these programs. In Los Angeles County, for example, departments compete for the money based on whether their innovation either saved money for the County or substantially improved program delivery or services.

In addition, all the park systems in our external peer review group as well as others we found across the country had effective communication mechanisms to promote the cross-fertilization of innovative ideas. Oakland encourages the sharing of innovations by having an employee recognition program. Under this program, managers contribute a dollar per

week to a fund which is used to reward individual employees each month who have excelled and made a contribution toward innovation.

The examples included in this section are only a sampling of the creative ideas and programs we found in other park and recreation systems. However, they are representative of the possibilities when there is an open and inclusive process and a sense of excitement and involvement in the park system by both its staff and its constituents.