Private and Voluntary Sector Involvement in Urban Recreation

Urban Consortium Information Bulletin

PRIVATE AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

IN URBAN RECREATION

An Information Bulletin of the

Community and Economic Development Task Force of the

URBAN CONSORTIUM

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FOREWORD

As a former mayor of New Orleans and a current cabinet officer in the Federal government, I have, I think, a special sense of the worth of this series of Information Bulletins developed by the Urban Consortium with funding from HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research.

Each of these bulletins deals with topics that local officials have identified as priority concerns; all would have been welcomed by me and my staff in New Orleans. They provide non-technical overviews, from the local government perspective, of issues, problems and current approaches for dealing with important community development concerns. I am sure local practitioners will find the bulletins informative. And certainly, from them HUD will gain new insights, useful for addressing the research needs of local governments more effectively.

Moon Landrieu
Secretary

PREFACE

This Information Bulletin is one of several prepared by the Community and Economic Development Task Force of the Urban Consortium.

The Urban Consortium is a formal organization of the nation's twenty-eight largest cities and nine large urban counties, which have joined together to increase the relevance of national research and development programs to the priority needs of urban areas. The Consortium provides a unique forum through which urban governments can work to define their common needs, identify high priority topics for research and development, participate in cooperative research with Federal agencies and researchers, facilitate demonstrations, improve the transfer of information to urban jurisdictions, and provide useful feedback to Federal agencies on proposed initiatives.

The Community and Economic Development Task Force of the Urban Consortium is one of ten Consortium Task Forces which have been organized to focus on priority urban R&D issues in ten functional areas. Through the Task Force, senior-level local government officials work to encourage research, development and demonstration activities which address priority community and economic development needs of large urban governments. Broad areas of concern and interest include: community development, urban economic development, planning, neighborhood revitalization, housing and recreation.

Each Information Bulletin covers a priority local government concern; it is designed to serve two purposes. First, it provides the members of the Task Force with a common information base from

which an overall R&D agenda and specific research initiatives can be developed. Second, it provides government officials, the research community, and others with a general statement of a priority need area, and an indication of the Consortium perspective and interests in seeking research resources to solve a priority problem.

An Information Bulletin concisely states the problem and major issues associated with a needs statement; explores the state-of-the-art and practice; identifies model practices, resource persons, and materials; and suggests potential research initiatives to respond to unmet needs, if any. In many instances, an Information Bulletin has served as a catalyst for local government collaboration with Federal agencies and the research community in addressing a priority local government concern.

The work of the Community and Economic Development Task Force and the development of these Bulletins has been supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research under contract #H-2886-RG. The overall program of the Urban Consortium is supported by the National Science Foundation.

Public Technology, Inc. (PTI) serves as Secretariat to the Urban Consortium and provides all staff support to the Consortium and its Task Forces. PTI is a non-profit organization doing research and development for local and state governments. It was established in 1971 by the major public interest groups representing state and local governments. The Board of Directors of PTI is now composed of the Executive Directors of the National League of Cities and the International City Management Association and chief executives from five local government subscribers of PTI. PTI's offices are located at 1140 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Telephone (202) 452-7700.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Given rising costs, rising expectations and declining budgets, the idea of partnerships between park and recreation agencies and private and voluntary sector groups seems promising. This Bulletin focuses on arrangements between park and recreation agencies and non-governmental organizations which served to decrease public costs and/or provide services which could otherwise not be provided. It provides background on the changes in public recreational expectations and patterns (e.g. more leisure time), the changing municipal role (e.g. new demands and burdens), and diminishing public resources (e.g. Prop. 13).

Given the current situation, local officials need to reassess the role of the public park and recreation agency in the local recreation context. The paper suggests the need for changes in the traditional thinking of citizens as recreation consumers and government as the recreation supplier because it encourages the notion that people have wants and needs while minimizing their own capacity to assist in fulfilling them. The current practice and potential of public/private/community arrangements and the key considerations and constraints involved in bringing about such arrangements are reviewed. The paper concludes by suggesting the need to learn more about apparent potential for public/private collaboration in park and recreation service delivery. More experience with systematic partnership development is seen as the primary need. A listing of information resources and a selected bibliography is also provided.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In a time of rising costs, rising expectations and declining budgets, the idea of partnerships between parks and recreation agencies on one hand and businesses, non-profit organizations and community groups on the other seems a promising approach to explore. In contrast to such 'hard' city services as police, fire and sanitation, parks maintenance and recreation activities look like natural beneficiaries of non-governmental support. But before pointing to partnerships as the wave of the future, we need to examine both some underlying issues in the parks and recreation field and some elements essential to effective relationships.

Scope of the Paper

First let us define the scope of the paper. The focus will be arrangements between public recreation and park agencies and non-governmental organizations which serve to decrease costs and/or provide services which otherwise could not be provided. Thus excluded are arrangements between public agencies--a recreation department and a school department, for example--which, although they may result in more cost-effective services, represent a transfer of functions within the public sector rather than a public-private partnership. Furthermore, contracts between government and commercial service providers will be excluded since the for-profit element suggests a number of considerations which deserve to be looked at independently.

In addition, the paper will focus on partnership arrangements specifically urban in character as opposed, say to voluntary maintenance of trails in national parks. It will also set as a criterion that partnership arrangements must be at least minimally formal and on-going as opposed to ad hoc, sporadic or singular instances of help which an agency cannot count on in its planning and budgeting process.

A note to be emphasized at the outset is that this paper recognizes but will not concentrate on the innumerable, predominantly small scale cooperative ventures so common in the parks and recreation field. If it is true that almost every parks department can point to some example of cooperation between itself and a business, service organization, church, community group or the like, it is also true that most of these partnerships are marginal from a fiscal and operational point of view. What we are concerned with here is the possibility of using often familiar partnership tools in new, more substantial, and more systematic ways. Thus implied are altered roles for all concerned: the public sector, the private sector, and users. In this sense the paper is an exploration on a frontier of parks and recreation practice rather than the documentation of the wealth of modest, often homely partnerships which most professionals are already well acquainted with.

Historical Context

Before examining the present practice and potential of partnerships in detail, it will be worthwhile to set the discussion in a brief historical context and thereby raise some of the underlyng isssues

which need to be kept in mind. If we could step back forty or so years, we would see city parks for the most part devoted to passive enjoyment of the outdoors, such as strolling in a public garden or rowing on a city pond or family picnicking. Playgrounds, meanwhile, were by current standards spartan, with pipe frame swings and see-saws and sand boxes, or equally spartan ball fields with perhaps a wire backstop and some sagging benches. No one expected much more. Thus ornamental gardens, Olmsted-style landscaped green spaces and "plumber's playgrounds" (so called because of the ubiquitous piping used for equipment) fairly represent the varieties of amenity provided. Recreation, at the same time, was much more a matter of personal initiative or the province of church and social groups or left to private benevolence.

Evolving Patterns of Recreation

Since World War II, however, there have been some marked changes in recreational expectations and patterns. Whether or not individual households actually have more leisure time than in the past, there is a national sense that leisure has become at least as important as work in people's lives. One form 'leisuring' has taken is the quite passive one of watching television. Television has undoubtedly supplanted the evening stroll in the park for many neighborhood residents; and in a sense television is the most powerful competitor public recreational spaces and facilities may have.

At the same time a counter-trend has been in progress since World War II. This has been the trend toward more expensive, sophisticated

leisure activities such as scuba diving, sking, hang-gliding, surfing, and so on. Most of these, evidently enough, also involve the use of the car. In fact, people's freedom to travel many miles for their recreation has been another potent factor in diminishing the attraction of the local park or playground--in towns as well as cities.

Parks and recreation departments, sometimes without even realizing it, have attempted to keep up with the competition. In part from perceived community demands, in part as well from internal pressures which may be political in nature, many large parks and recreation systems have installed sophisticated facilities such as hockey rinks, elaborate play equipment complexes, heated indoor pools, recreation centers with basketball courts and game rooms, professional standard playing fields with flood lighting for night use and so on.

In some cases these expensive facilities are well respected, well used and well maintained. In others, there has been severe disappointment as they are neglected, vandalized, apparently little appreciated. Furthermore, neighborhood facilities are frequently under-utilized while major intown parks such as Boston Common, Central Park in New York or Golden Gate Park in San Francisco have, since the 1960's, become sites for demonstrations, festivals, rock concerts, and other massive weekend gatherings that can create problems of overuse.

The Changing Municipal Role

These evolving recreational patterns have strained municipal departments--psychologically as well as fiscally. And here is the often

unrecognized dilemma for the administrators of urban parks and recreation systems. They are finding it very difficult to identify their place in today's leisure market.

Meanwhile, new burdens have been thrust upon them. During this same post-war period, for example, the concept of public recreation has expanded to take in arts, crafts, cultural activities and environmental education in addition to competitive sports and physical fitness. Furthermore, we have experienced the rising recreational expectations of groups such as the elderly, the physically handicapped and retarded persons. Whether or not these expectations are met, they present a theoretically enormous list of obligations for municipal parks and recreation agencies.

In addition to what one might call legitimate burdens, the same agencies have been taxed by the abuses of our post-war technology. Disposable bottles and cans, spray paints fast food refuse, felt tip pens, filter tip cigarettes, xeroxed handouts are all irritants municipal departments hardly need when they are trying to keep up outmoded facilities, provide costly and specialized maintenance services to newer facilities, and are finding that mechanization can offer only modest gains in a field which still depends so much on personal attention.

Diminishing Resources

Budgets have not grown with the burdens, and are not likely to do so. Many older cities have been forced to undergo a general belt

tightening. Other jurisdictions have enacted Proposition 13-type tax measures, causing even more drastic budget reductions. And parks and recreation departments which have come to rely on CETA employees, often for as much as 40% of their permanent staff, face cutbaks in CETA funding. Help from the federal government is on the way in the form of the Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program, but these funds are primarily for the renovation of facilities and provide only marginal amounts for planning and operation.

In response to the fiscal crisis, parks and recreation agencies have done a number of things to reduce expenditures. Among them are cutting back services, eliminating less popular programs, reducing overall service standards, and in extreme cases mothballing facilities. Another approach is the introduction of fees or the increase of existing fees for services such as tennis, golf and sailing, with fees collected directly or through concessionaires. Yet another is contracting out services to private firms which pay lower salaries and provide fewer benefits. Finally partnership--and the subject of this paper--is the public-private partnership approach.

II. UNDERLYING ISSUES

Nationwide it appears that funds for the operation of municipal parks and recreation systems will continue to diminish--in some cases radically. Given this situation, officials can simply bemoan the fact that they are sliding farther and farther below former levels of service; or they can undertake the more creative exercise of reassessing the place of a public agency in the local recreation context.

Reassessing Role

The goal of a local assessment would be to establish what might be termed an agency's "functional integrity." That is to say, the type and level of services it is uniquely able to provide within existing constraints so that it does not waste its energies where there is little or no demand, nor waste them where alternative resources might help to do the job.

An analytical process need not be very sophisticated to yield useful results. It might be based on a series of questions such as these:

- Are we providing facilities and services for which there is little or no demand?
- Are we providing other <u>needed</u> facilites and services which the department is uniquely able to provide?
- Are we providing some facilites abd services for which outside support might be obtained?
- Are we providing some facilities and services which might sustain themsemlves?

The goal of this kind of exercise should be quite evident. It is to relocate a public parks and recreation system in its context. It is an approach that can help to show departmental officials where traditional concepts and ways of doing things may have lead to misallocated resources and missed opportunities.

Let's give a brief example of the kind of review we are suggesting. In considering the range of its services, a city parks and recreation department decides that one of its most popular programs is league softball. Dozens of teams and thousands of people get pleasure from games played all over the city. The department does scheduling, makes fields available, prepares them before games, provides umpires, supplies lighting when necessary, and cleans up afterward.

Now what is the indispensable part the department plays in this successful program? What is its unique contribution? Well, the facilities, of course. There would be no games without the ballfields But what about the rest? What about lining the fields, paying umpires, cleaning up afterwards? Could the league teams make more of a contribution than they do? Could there be a partnership arrangement in place of the supplier-consumer relation that presently exists? It appears that there could be, and departmental resources saved might be applied elsewhere.

Public Expectations

The example above illustrates how an agency might reassess its role in order to provide the minimum necessary contribution to a recreational activity clearly judged to be in demand. In a period of dwindling

resources this only makes sense: where private effort can plausibly be called on for support, an agency should think about tapping it so that scarce funds can be used where they cannot be replaced.

There is a major issue involved here. That is the issue of expectations. If people are encouraged to think of themselves exclusively as recreation consumers and the public sector as a recreation supplier--especially at a time when supplies are being curtailed--there is bound to be frustration and disappointment. For instance, if the league softball teams are educated to expect it as their due that if in the course of time a department can no longer carry out these tasks well or at all, there is bound to be anger. But clearly the anger will be a result of what players have been led to expect. In the example cited they have not been encouraged to feel they have an obligation to help sustain this favorite recreational activity.

One might well argue that a neglected area for parks and recreation officials is the opportunity they have to help define levels of expectation and thus arrive at a better match between what public agencies can provide and what various constituencies contribute as their share in urban recreation.

The alternative to readjusting expectations is to leave in place theoretically high standards of adequate public recreation services which are less and less met in practice. This is an unfortunate circumstance for two reasons. First, it puts public agencies in the unenviable position of being unable to deliver what they may unconsciously postulate as a proper level of service. Second, it neglects

the psychological truism that personal investment, of some kind, tends to increase the benefit of an activity to its user.

III. PARTNERSHIPS: CURRENT PRACTICE AND POTENTIAL

The past few years have witnessed major shifts in national attitudes toward government, at all levels. Municipal parks and recreation services may not be the highest on the list of government functions people are apt to complain about; but as tax caps and budget cuts become more common, such 'soft' services as recreation programs are especially vulnerable. It is in this atmosphere that public-private partnerships are increasingly under consideration by local officials throughout the country.

However, a review of the literature, as well as personal and phone interviews, indicates that in actual practice partnership arrangements have not advanced much from what they have been for a number of years. Almost every jurisdiction contacted had some examples of partnerships. Yet in relatively few cases have local agencies systematically built them into their operations. Even such promising examples as one can cite are modest. Furthermore, partnership arrangements that look impressive in the literature often turn out to be tentative and marginal when viewed at close range. Nevertheless, there are existing arrangements around the country that may be instructive. Three of them are summarized below.

Seattle

Seattle's Parks and Recreation Department contracts with twenty community groups to provide maintenance in a number of the city's smaller neighborhood parks. Participating groups have either approached

the city directly or have been recruited by the Department. Initiated three years ago, the program dispenses monthly amounts that range from $150 to $200 for a total annual cost to the city of $30,000. For the most part payments are retained by the community organization itself, although in a few cases these organizations do pay the persons--usually neighborhood women--who do the actual work. The amount of payments is based on pre-established estimates of how long certain maintenance tasks should take. Work performance is monitored by district crew chiefs.

Although holding down maintenance outlays is a consideration, officials emphasize that a more important motive is stimulating pride and concern. Among the indirect benefits has been a considerable reduction in vandalism. Officials concede a few failures, but in general they seem very pleased with the program which operates at sites all over the city. Nevertheless, they remain cautious about it and are not rushing toward wholesale expansion--in part because of concern about potential difficulties on the labor front.

Cincinnati

The 1926 separation of parks functions from recreation functions has helped officials of the Cincinnati Parks Board to identify and generate support from its natural constituencies. For example, several major trust funds have been established by private interests to fund parks related functions. More germane to this paper, however, is the Park Board Volunteers organization.

Building on a tradition of interest in beautification and garden clubs, the Park Board has welcomed the creation of a volunteer force, now numbering about 150, which offers tours of the city conservatory, operates the gift shop and concessions, handles educational programs, and may move into limited flower bed tending in the future. In fact so successful have the volunteers been at their entrepreneurial efforts, they have been able to buy uniforms for the Board's naturalists.

In addition to the Volunteers, the Park Board also benefits considerably from an organization called Friends of Cincinnati Parks, a business-oriented group with some 800 fee-paying members. Among their other supportive activities, friends of Cincinnati Parks publishes a newsletter informing the public about departmental functions and plans. Officials emphasize that without the partnership arrangement, it would be quite impossible to provide this valuable public relations tool.

Park Board officials, who express themselves as very pleased with these partnerships, stress a couple of points of possible value to other departments. In the case of volunteers, they note that it is extremely important to overcome staff fears in regard to outside assistance on what is seen as professional gound. This can be done, but it takes some patience and a large initial commitment in managerial time and energy.

In the case of the Friends organization, or groups like it, officials concede that there could potentially be infringement on departmental authority. Thus, while suggestions are solicited and

often used, officials feel it must be clear to all concerned that final decisions have to rest with the Board if orderly management is to be maintained.

Hartford

Hartford's Parks and Recreation Department has experimented with an innovative approach to recreational programming. In addition to a traditional core of recreation offerings, the Departmment, under its Neighborhood Incentive Program (NIP), contracts with neighborhood residents and groups to run recreation programs using CDBG funds. Each year the Department distributes circulars inviting citizens to submit proposals. Recreation counselors also seek out, usually through word of mouth, other potential contractors. Help is provided in planning the program, preparing budgets and writing informal proposals. Advisory councils made up of neighborhood residents review the proposals and decide which will be funded out of a fixed neighborhood allocation. Between 100 and 150 contracts are written each year. These range in size from $200 to $4,000 and are monitored by the recreation counselors.

Officials see several benefits in this approach. The first is that it encourages people to share their talents with their neighbors. A contractual arrangement helps to do this by assuring them of the Department's support. The Departmrent refers to them as 'contractors' rather than 'volunteers' in order to emphasize that both they and the Department have legel responsibilities to each other.

Another benefit, although it cannot be measured precisely in dollars, is that contractors have access to resources which directly benefit their neighbors but would not be available to the Department. In addition to 'scrounging' materials, contractors make use of 113 non-traditional facilities such as homes, churches and clubs, and approximately a quarter of them call on neighbors, friends and relatives to assist in the programs.

The Hartford approach also provides an index of a community's leisure needs and priorities. While many of the programs are quite conventional, others might not have occurred to even the most imaginative recreation director. Hartford officials hope to extend the program, meshing it with the more traditional recreation services. As this happens, the advisory councils will be used to set spending priorities. The advisory councils, unaccustomed to having authority, were hesitant at first about allocation decisions, but with several years' experience are now making acute judgments about trade-offs between benefits and costs.

The key point Hartford officials emphasize is the change in their own role. This is reflected in the change of job titles from recreation 'supervisor' to recreation 'counselor.' Counselors describe their job as 'energizing' or 'actualizing' recreation resources which already exist in a community rather than directly providing services.

Uncertain Promise

The Seattle, Cincinnati and Hartford examples should be taken as suggestive rather than representative. At the moment it appears

to be only the more imaginative agencies which have shown the ability to advance public-private partnerships beyond the familiar and nominal examples so frequently cited. Whether this indicates that the potential is less than one might hope for, or simply that the situation has not sufficiently ripened to bring about a much expanded public-private collaboration remains to be seen.

Nationwide, systematically established partnerships are more an intriguing idea than a prevailing practice. What our assessment suggests is a watershed period in which the need for new ways of providing parks and recreational services is becoming urgent and in which new resources are being sought.

IV. KEY CONSIDERATIONS

It would be unrealistic for public agencies to expect private institutions to close the gaps in municipal parks and recreation budgets. The experience of cities such as Milwaukee and Detroit, which have relatively sophisticated approaches to soliciting private resources, indicates that, in fiscal terms at least, the potential for partnerships is marginal. Private resources provide "bits and pieces" which these cities use to supplement their programs but do not constitute a substantial portion of their budgets. This is not to diminish the potential importance of partnerships, however. There are other benefits to be gained even for somewhat reduced public programs.

o Although the financial dividends of public-private arrangements may be limited, both Milwaukee and Detroit receive funds and other help for special sports programs, capital improvements, equipment and material which would be unaffordable or even considered frivolous on a restricted budget.

o Partnerships can involve more individuals and organizations in recreation activities. For example Baltimore, Los Angeles and Greensboro, North Carolina have extensive volunteer programs, each involving hundreds of volunteers who devote thousands of hours to recreation programs. It may be worth noting that many people probably get more satisfaction from serving in recreation programs than being served by them.

o In addition to any other benefits which derive from private involvement, partnerships can be a source of ideas, imagination, special

skills and enthusiasm which could not be generated by municipal agencies beleagured by day-to-day problems. Boston's Summerthing, a citywide arts and theatre program, tapped a reservoir of talent and resources which would not otherwise have been available.

o Partnerships can also help to give a municipal agency a much better sense of changing patterns of leisure preference. Increased private involvement creates a climate in which initiatives are more likely to emerge. And the amount of time, energy and money people are willing to invest in an activity provides one useful measure of demand. The Hartford Neighborhood Incentive Program described above gives the city an indicator of neighborhood interest in programs as well as an inventory of the skills and talent locally available.

Taking an Aggressive Stance

Before considering the actual identification of partners, it should be noted that if the potential of partnerships is to be realized, parks and recreation departments must adopt a more aggressive posture toward private involvement. A survey of cities around the country reveals that most agencies share what might be called a "poor relation" attitude, showing gratitude for "anything that comes along," such as donations of land, ornamental fountains, or special events sponsored by large corporations. Such a department is characteristically willing to cooperate with a donor, but the initiative for the partnership generally comes from the private sector.

In contrast, a few departments have begun to take a more 'entrepreneurial' approach: that is, assessing needs, identifying potential partners and aggressively seeking out private participation. California's East Bay Regional Park District, for example, has an office specifically for the development of private resources. Others such as San Francisco have established non-profit parks fountains. Whatever the organizational arrangement, it appears that the more aggressive agencies will generate greater private resources for public recreation.

Brokering

The foregoing discussion leads us to yet another of the considerations this paper wishes to stress. That is an agency's need to think of brokering rather than simply providing as it contemplates the future of service delivery. If we can assume that providing facilities and services is going to become more and more difficult as budgets become tighter, what alternative role presents itself? We might suggest that the alternative is a brokering role--determining parks and recreation needs and matching them up where possible with private resources. It hardly needs to be said that this will require a set of skills not generally cultivated in government--particularly public relations and marketing skills.

We are of course not suggesting that municipal agencies think about divesting themselves of their responsibilities as presently mandated; but it does appear that either a new degree of entrepreneurship will emerge spontaneously or will have to be consciously cultivated as the provider role becomes more difficult to maintain.

Surrogates

The obvious but not necessarily most effective way to approach a potential partner is for a department or agency to approach the partner directly. In fact an intermediary or surrogate may considerably increase the chances of establishing a relationship. A surrogate may perform one or several vital functions. They may act as guides, helping to show where the resources are. They may play the role of door-openers or ambassadors. They may lend credibility.

Let's begin with the last point, since the issue of credibility can be a large one thee days where the public sector is concerned. Government agencies' lack of credibility can inhibit private involvement in at least a couple of ways. First of all, people may resent being asked to support services which they feel should be provided out of often burdensome municipal taxes. Related to the feeling that, "we are already paying through the nose," is the view, however unjust, that public agencies are inefficient and wasteful and that limited private resources ought to be invested where, presumably, they will do more good.

There are of course exceptions. Some agencies do have a reputation for sound management and thus have less difficulty in attracting support. The Cincinnati Park Board, mentioned above, is an example. Others, such as Greensboro, have long-standing traditions of volunteer involvement. Also agencies now operating on austerity budgets may come in for some newly aroused sympathy in the private sector. Where a credibility problem does exist, however, and this is an assessment the agency must make candidly, a third party may help to overcome the problem. It may be a voluntary service organization which recruits,

schedules, and gives awards to volunteers who work in public recreation programs. Or it may be a private foundation set up to accept and administer private donations for parks and recreation purposes.

There is a reason perhaps more basic than credibility for considering the use of surrogates. This is the common sense observation that people are most apt to respond to those with whom they feel some bond of personal chemistry or professional or social affiliation. The most astute matchmakers understand this and ideally like to have exactly the right contact for every person involved in a partnership negotiation.

We'll offer just a few examples. One of the more obvious is a major or council president. Such official often have intangible ego rewards to offer that a parks commissioner may not have. The president of a bank, the director of a service organization, the chairman of a foundation board may be much more disposed to think about lending aid to a parks and recreation agency after the 'stroking' that a widely recognized public official can give.

Another instance is the persuasiveness of a member of a professional or social circle can have on a colleague who would not pay much attention to a direct appeal. A businessman, made an ally by an agency, may then go on to enlist a number of other allies on the golf course or over lunch, whereas a "government bureaucrat" might not be given the time of day.

In summary, the jargon phrase, "different strokes for different folks," does apply in the area of partnership building. If new partnerships do come about, it will be in part because public parks and recreation agencies either intuitively know how or learn how to enlist sur-

rogates where needed to open doors, carry positive messages, offer alternative sets of rewards--in cases where agencies and departments are not necessarily their own most effective spokespersons.

Analyzing Partnership Opportunities

There are several ways to identify potential partnerships. Chief among them are identification by needs, constituencies and resources.

The needs approach is the most obvious. A department or agency might begin by listing those goods and services which it may adequately supply but which others might share in providing to the public. Then it might add in a "wish list" of goods and services which could not possibly be obtained without outside help. Among the last category might be such things as management consultation, graphics assistance, public relations expertise, special programs and equipment.

Constituencies might then be listed. The constituency approach asks who, presently or potentially, may be interested in one aspect or another of a department's operation. In other words, who are and who might become friends, allies and donors? In order to derive such a list, a corollary exercise is required. That is to distinguish the range of a department's functions and alongside each to determine if a constituency presently or potentially exists.

This should encourage the conceptual disaggregation of services that often have gotten lumped together in multi-purpose parks and recreation agencies. Once functions are distinguished, it may be clear that each function has its own constituency. There may be a rugby league constituency, a garden club constituency, a handicapped children's con-

stituency, a joggers' constituency, a dog walkers' constituency. Proceeding by categories, one might list adult and juvenile sports, arts, culture, nature conservancy, environmentalism, gardening and beautification and so on.

A third way to identify partners--it will overlap to some extent with the constituency approach--is to carry out a systematic inventory of potential resources. Imagination is called for here,and a department may well profit from asking a variety of community leaders to assist in identifying the range of corporations, foundations, fraternal organizations, civic groups, local businesses, churches, media outlets, individual philanthropists, other government agencies, and so on who may have contributions to make.

Motivation

After identifying potential partners, thought must be given to the interests and motivations of various actors. The private sector often does not view a program as good or necessary in the same way an agency does. An agency, perhaps with surrogate help, must be able to put itself in the place of its partners in order to understand what would cause them to become involved. We have already mentioned an agency's constituencies. Some might lay out nature trails, others referee basketball games, yet others donate rose bushes; but the same project would seldom appeal to more than one of these groups.

A corporation may wish to create good will with a community or market its products and services. A foundation may support only projects which reflect its self-image as 'innovative' or 'responsible.' Individual philanthropists may wish to remain anonymous or to memorize them-

selves forever. The media may act on its propensity to publicize its own good works. Volunteers may be motivated by their need for recognition and self-esteem. Whatever the reasons, unless motives are properly identified and taken into account, the essential dynamic of partnerships will be lost.

V. SOME CONSTRAINTS

Among the possible constraints which need to be thought about are.

- Management capacity
- Costs and benefits
- Competition for available resources
- Support of volunteers
- Preparing agency personnel
- Policy and program control

Management Capacity

A constraining element is the management capacity of both the public agency and the private partner, particularly in contractual arrangements with non-profit agencies or community groups for maintenance and recreation services. Managers point out that private partners require as much or more attention from the department than commercial service providers. The department must be able to prepare work descriptions and schedules, provide equipment and supplies, set standards and monitor performance, and provide assistance when the contractor runs into problems. These seemingly mundane support services can be critical to the effectiveness of a partnership. Without support services, partners, particullarly the less experienced, may be overwhelmed by the difficulties of the task.

For its part the partner must often be able to schedule work assignments, train and supervise staff, fill out requisitions, keep the books,

and account for equipment. Not every private group has this capacity. Those which do not have or cannot readily develop such capacity may be able to find a more established agency to act as fiscal agent. Without these management skills, performance is likely to be disappointing.

Costs and Benefits

Another concern for officials should be the costs and benefits of private contributions. Though the natural reaction to a gift is to be grateful for it, an often overlooked question is whether the gift is really free. An elephant may be a present a parks department can ill afford if it must transport, feed, house and provide a keeper for the beast. The benefits of having an elephant may diminish in comparison to costs.

Even a rough calculation of actual costs can help a department assess the net benefits of a contribution. For example, a youth sports competition sponsored by a large corporation may be either a bonus or a financial burden. The corporation might supply publicity materials, printing, tee shirts, medals, trophies, and so on, while the department does the administration, prepares the site, supervises the event, and cleans up afterward. A cost estimate should therefore include any funds and materials provided by the department, as well as the time of administrative, recreation and maintenance personnel. Staff time is often omitted because, "they're there anyway," but it should be treated as a real cost to the department. A sense of the total expense involved will help a department decide whether to participate in such a program or use resources in some other way.

As a related point, it is in the department's interest to consider possible future costs of private arrangements. For example, one urban parks department entered into an agreement with a conservancy group to share the costs of building and maintaining a number of vestpocket parks. Sometime later the private group went out of business, leaving the department to bear the increased burden alone. Thus it is only prudent to consider such an eventuality, even though it may not be possible to guard against it completely.

Another aspect of the cost and benefit issue is front-end demands on staff time. Agency directors typically do much of the initial work of developing partnerships themselves. But as they seek to expand their efforts, they find that it requires more time than they can commit. One of three things usually happens. Most commonly, because staff resources are limited and other operational concerns may be more pressing, potential partnerships will get pushed to the sidelines. Another possibility is that the appeal of more program resources is so great that the department pursues the partnership anyway, over-extending itself administratively. Or the needed help is found, either by adding costly personnel or by diverting staff from other responsibilities. In any case an agency director might well take into account the increased demands on staff which result from an aggressive partnership effort.

Competition for Available Resources

Agencies seeking support from corporate or foundation sources for the first time have met unexpected competition--not only from private appeals but also from other city-sponsored projects. Envisioning a

reservoir of new resources, they often find they are vying for a limited pool of funds. This suggests several things officials might think about.

To begin with, those who are new in the field are likley to find that the first grant is the hardest. The difficulty here is gaining contacts, building relationships, establishing credibility. As noted earlier, surrogates may be useful at this point.. Next a public agency will have an easier time getting support for programs and services which don't duplicate those sponsored by other petitioners. And finally, by entering the competition for private resources, a department should be prepared for kinds of scrutiny it has not been used to.

Support for Volunteers

More commonly recognized is the commitment required by volunteer programs. Departments which have such programs point out that volunteers are not a free source of labor. To make effective use of them departments must devote considerable effort to their recruitment, screening, training, placement, supervision and recognition. In fact, volunteers frequently require as much or more support than regular emloyees. Some departments have a centralized volunteer coordinator; others delegate this responsibility to the manageers of the individual programs or facilities. Whatever the organizational arrangement, volunteer programs involve costs in staff time, even when a voluntary service organization does the recruitment.

An example of what can happen without adequate staff support comes from an agency which agrees to accept people from a corporate volunteer program. These largely middle class ssuburban volunteers were assigned to inner city recreation centers. Poorly prepared, the volunteers were soon scared off and the program abandoned. Had the department been able to match the assignments to the capacities of the volunteers and had it provided better training, the program might have been more successful. As it was, both the department and volunteers were soured by the experience.

Preparing Agency Personnel

Parks and recreation officials should also anticipate possible negative reactions their employees may have to partnerships. Staff must be readied for their new role, even if actual changes are slight. Adequate preparation can prevent misunderstandings and staff resistance. Departments which have implemented successful partnership programs tend to be those which have thought about the reactions of staff and organized labor. One way officials can help to avoid confrontations is to set up partnerships in such a fashion that no regular personnel will be replaced as a result--and to make that policy known throughout the department. In any event, pains should be taken to explain the rationale for a partnerhsip program and prepare affected employees for any changes it may entail.

Policy and Program Control

Partnership programs raise questions about the control of policy and programs. Here are three aspects of the control issue.

o In those instances where a private organization, such as a tennis club, provides services under an agreement with a city, some of the population which a public recreation agency has a responsibility to serve may be neglected. This may happen as a result of fees which exclude lower income people. It can also happen as a result of scheduling, age requirements, or application procedures. Thus the question of who is to be served must be considered when partnerships are being negotiated with the private sector.

o Another aspect of the control issue is making sure that the services provided by private organizations such as community groups meet public standards. This involves selling out what the standards are, monitoring the work done, and taking corrective action when necessary. In extreme cases this may mean terminating the relationship.

o Active volunteer and parks friends groups may sometimes feel that in view of their contribution they are entitled to a voice in agency decisions. This may mean something as trivial as the color of the tulips in a flower bed or as controversial as permitting a rock festival in a public park. Problems of this order may be minimized if the relationship between the partners is clearly understood from the outset.

In the first case noted above, the issue is who is to be served. In the second, quality of service is the issue. In the third, it is the need to find a balance between maintaining control on one hand while encouraging private initiative on the other. In all cases, clear communication between partners is critical to prevent a breakdown of partnership arrangements which may have begun with considerable promise.

The HSCRS "Private Sector" Series

A more thorough treatment of partnership opportunities and constraints may be found in a set of publications put out by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. This thoughtful and imaginatively illustrated series comprises a "how to library for parks and recreation officials who want a guide to partnership development. Key points are: first, that to succeed at all private sector partnerships must be done well; and second, that systematic analysis of needs, resources and mutual benefits is critical. Among the topics treated in detail are: establishing recreation councils, park and open space foundations, volunteerism, gifts, catalogues, land donations, and tax aspects of private sector involvement.

Available publications are Gifts Catalog Handbook, Volunteer Handbook, Fee and Charges Handbook, and the Citizen Action Manual. To request copies contact the Division of Implementation assistance, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. Publications are free of charge.

VI. CONCLUSION

Private contributions to the public welfare are characteristic of our country. In this sense partnerships are nothing new in the parks and recreation field. As noted earlier, it is probably a rare municipality that cannot point to a volunteer clean-up campaign or company assistance in a recreation program or something of the kind to demonstrate its experience with public-private cooperation.

However, if we review the last quarter century or so in the urban parks and recreation field--a time of generally increasing government assumption of responsibilities once viewed as private--what we note are partnership arrangements predominantly of an occasional nature. They have not been viewed by parks and recreation officials as having promise of much more than that because there was no pressing fiscal or political need to do so. At least through the early 1970's those in government were encouraged to see their own role as increasing, with sufficient funds to support an increased role. If there was a case to be made for partnerships, it was on the ideological ground that 'participation' is a good in and of itself, or that social benefits are to be derived from people taking a more active part in providing for their needs.

This line of reasoning certainly has had its supporters in as well as outside local government; yet it hardly carried significant weight against the momentum of more and more government assumption of a provider role. This has been so even in the face of evidence that government frequently has not proven itself an especially competent provider.

Budgetary constraints and major shifts in national attitudes toward government have changed the circumstances in which partnerships are being considered. Thus a lack of resources and skepticism about government efficacy has been added to the ideological arguments for considering new ways in which the private sector might help to deliver services.

But we are now only at the stage of interest, speculation, some occasional instances of experimentation. In the course of research for this paper, it became evident that partnerships based on systematic analysis of the relevant circumstances and developed as integral to an agency's functioning are still exceptional. Potential does seem to exist for the cooperative delivery of parks and recreation services, but this potential should be treated as a hypothesis to be tested. It may turn out that, like the commercial production of nuclear energy, the apparent potential will in fact be limited by impediments hard to evaluate before a body of experience has been built up.

We might conclude with a set of observations based on research for this paper which may help to frame discussion of both partnerships and the larger issue of the public role in urban recreation.

First, municipal parks and recreation agencies have in many cases been operating on the basis of assumptions about the recreation 'market' and the recreation 'consumer' which are increasingly dubious.

Second, the dwindling fiscal resources--or radically reduced resources as in the California case--may be the catalyst necessary to cause a rethinking of old assumptions and traditional roles.

And third, the nature of institutional response will in large measure be determined by the severity of an agency's fiscal situation and its ability to assess its place in a new world of leisure time alternatives.

A variety of scenarios can be read out of the above. Among them are these:

o Gradually diminishing resources in a department with little capacity for self analysis. One can predict deteriorating facilities, programs which less and less meet public need or demand, and a sloughing off of functions politically viewed as marginal.

o A sudden fiscal crisis for a department also incapable of reassessment and redirection. This has already resulted in systems where recreation programs have been given up altogether, facilities mothballed, and maintenance transferred to housekeeping agencies such as public works departments.

o A fiscal crisis long anticipated by a department capable of developing new resources to carry out at least some traditional functions in the hope that things will one day go back to 'normal.'

o A moderate to severe fiscal situation in an entrepreneurially inclined department. Through fees and charges and contracts with for-profit providers, a formerly public system could become virtually private.

o Again a moderate to severe fiscal situation in an entrepreneurially inclined and self-aware department. In this more moderate

instance, agency officials redefine the departmental role, striving to preserve the public interest function of the agency through a combination of partnership arrangements, fees and charges, as well as operating economies.

On a national basis there is no way to predict the future shape of municipal parks and recreation systems. We can now only begin to identify the circumstances under which effective partnerships will or might emerge. We need to know more about local contexts, including institutional and political dynamics, public expectations, the potential of private resources, and so on in order to determine where the concept might best be fostered. The next section addresses itself to this task.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

On the basis of work done for this information bulletin, it appears that more experience with systematic partnership development is the primary need. Demonstration projects may therefore be in order, and outlined below are the form several might take.

Building a Partnership Network

This demonstration project would identify leading jurisdictions and practitioners, along with individuals particularly interested in the partnership concept, in order to raise levels of awareness and to speed the sharing of experience. The project might include the identification of an audience, a catalogue of exemplary partnership arrangements, a newsletter designed to communicate emerging practices and issues, along with national and regional conferences and encouragement of media attention.

Partnership Assessment

This pilot project would develop and test methods by which assessment teams (either locally based or from the outside) could evaluate the present practice and potential of partnerships in a given jurisdiction. The project would include development of a model for evaluating the situation of local parks and recreation agencies, identifying and approaching private sector interests, and bringing appropriate local officials together to share findings on partnership possibilities and how they might be realized.

Leadership Development

This demonstration would involve parks and recreation agency officials, other city officials, members of boards and commissions, as well as directors of parks and recreation foundations. Objectives of the project would be to cultivate the concept of partnership arrangements, how to identify them, and ways to bring them about.

While a larger body of practice to draw on seems, in general, to precede an extensive research agenda, it is possible to conceive of small scale research projects which might be useful. Among them are:

- o An analysis of historical, institutional and other factors which appear relevant to the development of established partnership arrangements in selected jurisdictions.
- o A cost-benefit analysis of partnership arrangements with special attention to such intangible benefits as increased citizen involvement, sense of responsibility and possession, more positive attitudes toward parks and recreation agencies.
- o A national catalogue of urban parks and recreation partnerships presented on the order of HUD's Neighborhood Preservation Catalogue.

One could suggest several more research efforts on a similar scale. Each, at this point, might find a small audience and perhaps stimulate activity. However, they cannot be endorsed as having critical importance.

There is, on the other hand, a research project of potential importance: monitoring the evolution of parks and recreation systems under

tax reduction measures such as California's Proposition 13. Developments already reported suggest that conventional practices and ways of thinking about public parks and recreation systems are rapidly changing. A monitoring project might produce a variety of insights relevant to public-private relationships in the "era of less." At the moment, changes within individual departments are probably going unrecorded; yet the pattern of these changes may well spell out the conditions under which partnerships can be expected to succeed or fail elsewhere.

VIII. INFORMATION RESOURCES

Local Government

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950 Eden Park Drive
Cicinnati, Ohio 45202
513/352-4079

Phyllis Posy
Department of Parks
and Recreation
502 City-County Building
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15222
412/255-2357

Walter R. Hundley
Parks & Recreation Department
Municipal Building
Seattle, Washington 98104
206/625-2658

Harry Atkinson
Parks & Recreation Department
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Balboa Park
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714/236-5726

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635 Randolph
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Parks & Recreation Dept.
25 Stonington Street
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203/566-6320

Linda Chou
East Bay Regional Park
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11500 Skyline Drive
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919/373-2000

Jim Ruth
Parks & Recreation Dept.
630 North Anaheim
Anaheim, CA 92805
714/533-5265

Gordon Sprague
Park Commission
2599 Avery
Memphis, Tennessee 38112
901/454-5759

Ken O'Neill
Recreation & Parks Divisior
851 North Market
Jacksonville, Florida 3220:
904/633-2540

Federal Government

Ray Murray
Heritage Conservation & Recreation Service
Pacific Southwest Region
450 Golden Gate Avenue
P.O. Box 36062
San Francisco, CA 94102
415/556-8710

Other Organizations

Bob Friedman
National Conference for Developing
Local Private-Public Enterprises
1527 Eighteenth, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202/387-5833

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