

## 10.06 - Research Investigation

**Standard:** The agency shall conduct at least one experimental exploration or research investigation each year related to park and recreation operations. These are demonstration or pilot projects where performance data are collected before and after the test to determine effectiveness.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Provide a report on a current or recent experimental or demonstration research project designed to improve a product or to test a new process or procedure, including methods used and research findings; provide brief descriptions of other research investigations undertaken over the past five (5) years.

Informational reference in the *Management of Park and Recreation Agencies*, (2010), 3rd Ed., Chapter 23 – Evaluation and Action Research, pp. 658-659.

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### Agency Evidence of Compliance:

The Park District often implements new ideas in order to better serve the community and places a heavy emphasis on measuring results. Examples of recent investigations include:

#### 2017 - Parks Passport

In an effort to get kids 5-13 to stay active and learn new things about their parks and community, the Park District built a Parks Passport program encouraging kids to stay active by going to your local parks and recreation facilities. The idea for the park passport came about when Leah Pryor, a program supervisor at the park district attended a session on a nature passport at the North American Environmental Education Association's annual conference. Other members of the recreation team and the marketing team helped to develop content and find sponsors for the project. Finally it was submitted to the Park District's innovation committee which provided funding for printing the final product. An interactive booklet was created encouraging kids to explore certain parks and recreation facilities in Oak Park. Collaboration was integral for the program, individuals from the recreation department, marketing department and the innovation team came together to work on the passport. The program was also a partnership between the public and private sector. A local business owner was featured in the passport and also provided coupons which helped to incentivize participants to complete the program. In its first year, the Program saw nearly 100 participants proving its effectiveness.

#### 2016 - Park Benches with Power Access

In order to see if the Park District could better monitor the amount of people in our parks, it purchased 4 solar powered benches with the ability to charge cell phones. In addition to providing residents the ability to power their phones, the Park District now receives real-time updates on the amount of people visiting our parks. See below for average daily totals in Scolville Park for an example of the data. Using this information we can better determine when work orders are needed and determine where our grassroots marketing will be most effective for special events. The idea also connects to our goal of incorporating technology into our parks. Since the benches were installed, the Park District has seen the power charging features used extensively. The Park District is also using the data of visitors in the parks to improve operations such as measuring how often a bathroom and parks equipment needs to be replaced. Through these projects the Park District will determine the return on investment of the benches and potentially purchase additional ones in the future.

Scolville Park Measurements	2017	2016
Average Daily Totals	1846	1833

#### 2015 - Launch Pad

To promote more innovation, the Park District purchased an idea management system called Launch Pad. The Launchpad Program allows the District to implement ideas that otherwise may not be possible by engaging all staff to share their best ideas. Since its implementation, the Park District has implemented 38 new ideas with nearly 400 ideas posted. Some of the ideas born from the Launch Pad program include the SOOFA phone charging stations (see above) in four of our parks, the installation of cisterns in three park locations, and the Parks Passport Program (see above) to be rolled out to all school-aged kids this summer.

Measure	2015	2016	2017
Ideas Funded	14	13	11

#### 2014 - Identification Requirement at Basketball Courts

Due to fights and negative behavior on Park District basketball courts, staff tested a new protocol which required individuals 17 years or old to show identification and sign-in to participate at one of the basketball court sites.

Over the course of the summer, incidents decline once the process was implemented. A Sport Court Report<sup>1</sup> was completed to document the results.

#### 2013 - Dashboard Use

In order to better monitor the agency's performance, the Park District investigated methods to display agency-wide performance measures, including the current annual report, monthly Excel spreadsheets, Excel charts, and dashboards. The Park District tested several options, including dashboard software. Staff collaborated with a software provider to conduct several trials with dashboards and the Park District determined that the dashboards would be the best option. Software was installed in 2013 and the Park District began tracking many measures to determine the Park District's baseline performance levels. The software was rolled out to staff in 2014. Many improvements in performance were observed, including program registration, pass sales, and overall Oak Park household participation.

Measure	2012	2013	2014
Program Registrations	26,216	24,477	29,369
Pass Sales	10,721	7,011	11,811
Household Participation	not tracked	26%	30%

#### 2012 - Athletic Field Study

Park District athletic fields are in high demand by a variety of sports user groups and limited in number as the Park District only has a total of 82 acres which includes parks, facilities, and fields. The Park District conducted a study to understand how many hours each field was being permitted as well as to identify best practices for field maintenance. The study provided recommendations on field maintenance practices as well as recommendations for adding synthetic turf to the Park District portfolio. The Park District implemented the recommendations which have led to better field conditions through overseeing and adding irrigation and an aggressive aerification process.

Additionally, the Park District has already added two synthetic turf fields to its system. The Athletic Field Usage Report<sup>2</sup> demonstrates that with the changes, the Park District was able to initially lower the usage on the fields and then better align use with recommendations in the second year.

#### 2011 - Online Rentals

In 2011, the Park District examined its rental process. Staff realized that all rental processes required customers to contact the Park District to determine the availability of the facility they were interested in and then to physically fill out a form and in many cases, come into a Park District facility to complete a rental application. Staff decided to improve this process and began by adding facility calendars for some facilities to the Park District website so that customers would have access to check availability online before filling out an application. Based on the success of

this, staff decided to expand this by developing electronic rental processes to allow residents to reserve facilities online. The following spring, staff made picnic areas and community centers available for online rental. It was well received, but required additional promotion of this new feature. The Park District has added gymnastics parties to the rental options in 2013 and pool and rink parties in 2014. The results for online rentals are as follows:

Online Rental Type	2011	2012	2013	2014
Picnics & Parties	0	19	92	146
Community Center Rentals	0	71	127	138

The number of online rentals as well as revenue generated has increased. Additionally, the residents have appreciated the ease. This change in process has proven successful and staff will continue to identify additional rentals to add to the website.

### 2010 - Carry In/Carry Out Program

The Park District's Green Advisory Committee (GAC) recommended educating sports teams about the importance of recycling as well as reducing the amount of trash disposed of at parks. The committee met with representatives of Oak Park Youth Baseball and Softball and got their support to educate t-ball league parents and participants. Signs were posted at five fields promoting the program. Additionally, trash cans were moved further away from the ball fields to reduce the convenience. In 2011, the GAC reviewed the results of the initiative with Park District staff and found the reduced refuge resulted in fewer overflowing trash receptacles on or near the field. the program was expanded to including all OPYBS locations. Based on its added success, the program was again expanded to eventually include all youth sports leagues at all Park District athletic fields.

Program Reach	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Sports Participants	0	240	1,600	3,700	4,000

### Documentation:

1. [10.06.00\\_Sport-Courts-Operations-Report.pdf](#)
2. [10.06.00\\_Athletic-Field-Use-Report.pdf](#)

Agency Self Assessment: MET

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