

TRENDS

Overview

It is important to identify parks and recreation trends when master planning for the future. Many times trends are not identified in traditional park planning meetings or surveys. For example, in the *1994 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan*, skateboarding was not recognized as a participation activity by Columbia residents, much less as a high priority item. However, at the same time, skateboarding was extremely popular in California, Washington, and New York; and ultimately, became quite popular in Columbia. Hence, a chapter devoted to the identification of parks and recreation trends has been added to this *2002 Facility Needs Update*.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify recreational and leisure trends that may become an important programming or facility need for the citizens of Columbia, Missouri. Economic, technological, societal, and energy-related trends are not addressed in this chapter. While they are important, they are important to the City as a whole and not just the Parks and Recreation Department. For example, trends such as battery-powered maintenance trucks will impact future City operations, not just the Parks and Recreation Department.

Differentiating between a trend and a fad can be difficult. As discussed in a presentation by Leon Younger of PROS, Inc., a trend is an overall direction or course, is accepted by many market segments, and is long term. Trends will support and complement important lifestyle changes. The more diverse and immediate the benefits, the greater the likelihood it will remain a trend. A fad usually appears rather quickly, is adopted with enthusiasm, peaks early, and declines very fast. If it conflicts with basic lifestyle changes and is exaggerated, extreme, or impractical, it is likely to be a fad. Trends and fads may be interwoven and dependent on each other. Trends are often supported by developments in other areas. For example, while "exercise" may be trend, there are fads within that trend, such as the kinds of exercise - elliptical runner, rock climbing walls, ab-rollers, racquetball, and wally-ball. These fads can rise and fall in popularity, even though exercising for health reasons remains a trend.

There are also financial benefits to agencies that identify trends in a timely manner. Those that are first to identify and act on a trend gain a competitive advantage. Those that miss a trend often spend time and resources trying to catch-up. Finally, being able to identify a fad provides the opportunity to reap the short-term benefits and then abandon it when it begins to lose popularity.

Ascertaining trends can benefit the operation of a community recreation center. Identifying current equipment needs, securing the equipment, recognizing pieces that become obsolete, and replacing them with current "hot" pieces contribute to the overall success of the center.

Often centers operated by government agencies find themselves playing catch-up due to the advance financial planning requirements.

The methodology used to identify trends consisted of a review of leading journals and publications; consumer purchasing patterns; state and national recreational participation patterns; and presentations at conferences, seminars, and workshops. Internet listserv discussions with recreational practitioners in other parts of the country provided information on current issues. Many of these discussions were conducted via internet listserves, such as, the National Recreation and Parks Association's ActiveParks site and The Herman Group's Trend Alert service.

Trend identifications are divided into two sections: Facility Trends and Participation. Section I reviews facilities that may or may not have future impact on the Parks and Recreation Department. Section II discusses recreational participation trends that are occurring in both the department and throughout the country. Also included in this chapter are five-year participation levels from the Parks and Recreation Department's existing activities and facilities, reflecting local trends.