

### **3. Outstanding Nature of Agency**

**What makes your agency “outstanding”? Please cite 3 specific examples to support why your agency is “outstanding.”**

9 points – 3 for each example Max word count 180

#### **More than parks**

Among the largest park systems in the nation, we manage 8,300+ acres of green space and 580+ parks. Besides overseeing parks that cater to the character of each neighborhood, we also manage Solider Field, the first LEED certified NFL stadium and home to the Chicago Bears, 26 miles of lakefront with 24 beaches, 10 harbors, two conservatories, 10 world-class museums, a free zoo, golf courses and natural areas, while also providing hundreds of programs and events.

#### **Partnerships**

A top priority, keeping programs affordable and accessible for children, is accomplished through partnerships. We work with the NFL, MLB, NHL, and NBA to provide free youth sports leagues. We partner with TrueStar, a non-profit, to provide teens creative outlets through development of a teen magazine.

#### **Public Art**

We bring amazing neighborhood art through 200 permanent public pieces located in 67 parks connecting communities culturally. This expanded in 2012 with the largest Chicago exhibition in a decade of 53 outdoor sculptures, including Orly Genger’s "Hot Rod," a bright red sculpture and artist Steinunn Thórarinsdóttir's 26 life-sized androgynous figures “Borders.” (179)

### **4. Impact Upon Community**

**Tell us your story about how your agency positively impacts the community you serve. Share with us actions or activities your agency has been involved with or undertaken in the past three years.**

10 points – 2 for each example Max 200 word count

We recognize that violence is an issue. We responded with Windy City Hoops, a program that provides teens the opportunity to be active, have fun and play basketball. This free league is offered year-round at 10 parks citywide on weekends and evenings providing a safe and productive activity for almost 2,500 youth. We used Indiegogo to crowd-raise program funding.

Award winning infrastructure, built with community input, connects residents to the experiences of recreation and nature. The 606/Bloomington Trail, a three-mile long elevated trail, and Big Park in Little Village, a 22 acre park, knit neighborhoods together. “Take the Field,” 11 artificial turf fields built with public and private resources in underserved and geographically diverse parks, puts fields where demand

is at its highest. 31<sup>st</sup> Street Harbor provides an ADA-accessible playground and a “green roof” picnic area above an indoor parking garage that functions as a winter boat storage area.

We’re working to transform the Chicago River into our “next recreational frontier.” With several community parks on the River, we already provide fishing access and natural habitat. We built two boathouses as launch sites for kayaks and rowing boats. Rowing clubs are partnering with schools to engage youth in the sport. (200)

## **5. Use of Valuable Resources**

**There are few resources more critical than public support, citizen involvement, and staff engagement. Please identify outstanding or innovative ways in which your agency addresses these three components.**

9 points – 3 for each example Max 180 word count

Level of Outstanding/Innovative (1)

Range and Depth of Actions (1)

Perceived Level of Effectiveness (1)

### **Public Support**

When a theatrical family learned their local park needed funds for a playground renovation, Circus in the Parks was born. The intimate, accessible, high quality theatrical circus raised nearly \$20,000 for the cause. Now in its seventh year, Circus continues to expand, raising funds for other park improvements and programming across the city. Celebrating community, raising funds and rebuilding parks one Circus at a time.

### **Citizen Involvement**

Through more than 195 park advisory councils comprising approximately 2,100 resident volunteers, we actively seek advice about our projects and programs. Board meetings, public hearings and sessions are live on our interactive website. And we receive hands-on support from hundreds of volunteers, nature stewards, and docents.

### **Staff Engagement**

Our Workforce Development Department offers professional training workshops, personal development seminars, and healthy living clubs for staff. Hundreds of in-person trainings are held each year and more are available online. Staff can participate in “Chicago Lives Healthy,” a comprehensive wellness program. The Illinois Park and Recreation Association recognized our efforts to support employee health and wellness with its 2014 Exceptional Workplace Award. (179)

## **6. Demonstration of Results**

**Public entities have been increasingly called upon to demonstrate the results of their services and practices to decision-makers and the general public. Please share with us 3 results, impacts, or outcomes you have measured and brief background about how the results were secured.**

9 points – 3 for each example Max 210 word count

Value of Outcome Assessment (1)

Methods of Measurement (1)

Sharing Results (1)

### **Performance Management**

Since 2011 we have been using performance management to meet our strategic plan goals. We track all departments' performance and 350 different measures from program offerings to social media users. Monthly performance meetings allow decision makers to review progress toward goals. Some notable results are a 37% annual enrollment increase in Learn to Swim, 17% increase in neighborhood soccer participation, 38% increase in trees planted, and a 60% increase in Facebook users.

### **Registration Analysis**

By making program registration 100% electronic with Activenet, we now have multiple sessions of data that we can analyze. We partnered with Northwestern University to do a customer market basket analysis to understand relationships between program usage and customer demographics. The analysis revealed trends that help us identify patterns and more effectively market our programs. In 2013, we had our highest registration ever at 304,000, a 20% increase over 2012.

### **Target Parks**

In 2012, using program registration data, we conducted strategic interventions at low enrollment or "Target Parks" to improve registrations. Action steps included: new or right-sized programs, professional development, marketing enhancements, and improved customer relations. Of the 36 Target Parks, 15 will graduate from the program. Whether performance or registration data, staff access all information through SharePoint, a web based communication tool. (209)

## **7. Innovations**

**Park and recreation agencies have long been known for the creative and innovative ways they manage their policies, services, and entire agency. One of the desirable outcomes of the Gold Medal Program is to identify these valuable efforts and approaches to be shared with others. Please identify and briefly explain 3 innovations used or implemented by your agency within the last three years.**

9 points – 3 for each example Max 210 word count

Level of Innovation (1)  
Perceived Level of Effectiveness (1)  
Results Achieved (1)

### **Park Points**

We believe in the importance of recognizing our fans. With Park Points, we reward our loyal customers with unique park experiences, the first park agency in the country to do so. Rewards have included breakfast at Buckingham Fountain, Chicago Blackhawks gear, and more. So far, we have over 7,100 Park Points users who have accrued over 800,000 points. Our goal was to maximize registration in our programs and expose us more on social media, and we've passed 15,000 Facebook likes.

### **Night Out in the Parks**

Our summer event series makes parks a welcome, safe haven particularly in low-income, high-crime communities. It brings arts and culture to neighborhoods that previously had limited access. With more than 50 arts and community partners, we provided over 700 events with more than 200,000 community members in attendance. The large audiences and positive feedback encouraged us to expand to more than 1,000 events across the city in 2014.

### **Special Events**

We are fortunate to host larger unique events such as the Chicago Marathon or Lollapalooza. We've started multi-year agreements with these larger events which give them dates over a 3-5 year period. For this privilege, we negotiated a higher rental rate. By maximizing our non-tax revenues, we can offer more affordable programs. (209)

## **8. Social Equity**

**In what ways has your agency in the last three years addressed the NRPA identified issue of social equity?**

3 points total Max 120 word count

Range of people included in equity efforts (1)

Extend of actions taken (1)

Perceived effectiveness of actions (1)

As the birthplace of the Special Olympics, social equity is in our blood. We serve 2,500+ special needs youth through year-round recreation programs at 21 parks. We offer \$1,000,000 in day camp scholarships annually for economically disadvantaged youth, providing greater access to recreation.

Infrastructure projects like Chicago Plays! – renovating 300 (60%) playgrounds in five years – ensures neighborhoods have access to the benefits of local parks. Our ADA transition plan renovates facilities making them accessible and welcoming to all.

With Coca-Cola, we provide Troops for Fitness, a program that features military-style fitness classes led by U.S. veterans. We prioritize veterans by providing fee discounts and job opportunities.

2014 saw our most successful Polar Plunge raise \$1,000,000 for Special Olympics. (118)

## 9. Health and Wellness

**In what ways has your agency in the last three years addressed the NRPA identified issue of health and wellness?**

3 points total Max 120 word count

Range of health issues addressed (1)

Extend of actions taken (1)

Perceived effectiveness of actions (1)

Each year, we offer free fitness classes throughout the city during Free Fitness Week at the beginning of January. We have 20,000 wellness program registrations annually.

In 2011 we partnered with the Chicago Health Department to evaluate our vending machines. As a result, we now stock 100% healthy and affordable snack and drink options while limiting calories, sodium, fat and sugar per serving.

In 2012 we started the Park Families Wellness Initiative, which offers fitness and nutrition classes to 125,000 patrons focused on improving a family's healthy lifestyle.

We support and host numerous community vegetable gardens, allotment gardens, and urban agriculture sites. We're partnering with Neighborspace and Penn State University to improve access to healthy food in urban food deserts. (120)

## 10. Conservation

**In what ways has your agency in the last three years address the NRPA identified issue of conservation?**

3 points total Max 120 word count

Range of issues addressed (1)

Extend of actions taken (1)

Perceived effectiveness of actions (1)

Through our Urban Camping program, kids experience kayaking, fishing, and hiking. In 2013, the program doubled in size, serving approximately 820 children. We are partnering with the World Wildlife Foundation in the Ten Million Kids Outdoors campaign.

We maintain and restore hundreds of acres of natural areas and sand dunes providing habitat, often with the help of volunteers. The Burnham Wildlife Corridor Volunteer Tree Planting is the largest

volunteer urban planting program in the nation - almost 1,400 youth and adult volunteers plant 50,000-75,000 native trees. The Northerly Island 40 acre habitat development project, with the US Army Corps of Engineers, restores rolling hills, a wetland, native plantings, boardwalks, and expanded camping opportunities.

All new construction meets LEED certification. (119)

## **11. Challenges**

**What challenges has your community and/or agency experienced over the past three years and what steps or actions have you taken to resolve these challenges.**

3 points total Max 210 word count

Agency role with challenges (1)

Types of steps of action taken (1)

Effectiveness of approach (1)

### **Connecting with Teens**

Teens weren't participating in our programs, but we weren't sure why. After completing a teen marketing study with help from Digitas, an integrated advertising agency, we learned the teens' perception of us was "uncool" and thought our programs were only for younger children. We turned those results into a positive initiative helping reengage teens back into our programs.

### **Action**

We developed teen advisory councils to help us understand their issues. A Teen Twitter Ambassador program helped promote programs like Night Out in the Parks. Teens from across the City help promote our events through Twitter, Vine, and other social media. An Instagram car photo contest got teens in the park and excited about our Night Out program. Our Park Points rewards program focused outreach to teens and tried to increase the incentive for them to head to the parks.

Another teen program TRACE - Teens Re-imagining Art, Community, and Environment - is a jobs-focused teen leadership program that cultivates young creative activists to advocate for and create change within their local communities. TRACE hosts Use Your Words workshops, which address issues affecting the youth, community building efforts and environmental leadership.

### **Focused Results**

In 2013, we registered over 22,000 teens in programs, a 44% increase over 2012. (209)