

Park District of Oak Park

2015 Gold Medal Application

Question 1: What makes your agency “outstanding”? Please cite 3 specific examples to support why your agency is “outstanding” (Total maximum word count 180)

We maximize fun with limited resources... Land-locked and densely-populated, PDOP meets the recreation needs of its **52,066** residents by leveraging every square foot of its 82.5 acres of parkland through strategic partnerships and careful planning. In 2014, PDOP served 29,384 program registrants, including 83% of all youth ages 5-11, and 11,811 facility pass holders.

We optimize growth using state of the art technology... Live data from registration, financial, HR, maintenance, and surveying software is displayed on dashboards for staff. Mapping software is used to identify new target markets and ensure service equity across the community. Facility attendants use tablets to collect customer feedback. Staff effectively coordinates projects ranging from special events to facility openings using project management software.

We utilize community input to shape our future... Input gained through community surveys, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, community meetings, online questionnaires, citizen advisory boards, and more has been key in development of the comprehensive plan and park site plans. It was instrumental in securing nearly \$2.8 million in grant dollars for 4 major park renovation projects in the past 5 years.

Question 2: Tell us your story about how your agency positively impacts the community you serve. Share with us 5 actions or activities your agency has been involved with or undertaken in the past three years. (2011-2014) (Total Maximum Word Count 200)

PDOP spent over \$5.6 million, including \$2.8 million in grants, to **renovate 7 parks**. We replaced 3 playgrounds, 5 ball fields and 12 tennis courts, improved 13 park entrances, and added a fen, war memorial plaza, labyrinth, 2 picnic shelters, concert stage, lacrosse field, nearly 1.5 miles of walking paths, 274 trees, and 89 benches.

After careful planning and a \$30 million bond sale, PDOP **constructed the Gymnastics & Recreation Center** and **completely renovated Ridgeland Common Recreation Complex**, the District’s flagship facility, to now offer year-round ice, an artificial turf field and an improved outdoor pool, to meet community demand without increasing taxes.

In the past 3 years PDOP has **increased scholarships awards** to residents by 230% from \$9,947 in 2012 to \$32,804 in 2014.

PDOP partnered with School District 97, Irving PTO, and local soccer organizations to install an artificial turf field at Irving School, replacing a dangerous blacktop area and bringing us closer to our goal of 3 community artificial turf fields. This field provides relief for our limited, overused athletic fields.

Through our unique PACT program, **field usage is equally distributed** to sports affiliates allowing 5,000+ children to enjoy baseball, softball, football and soccer in Oak Park.

Question 3: 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. (Maximum 210 Word Count)

Public Support (3 points) on the basis of

- **Level of Outstanding/Innovative (1)**
- **Range and Depth of Actions (1)**
- **Perceived Level of Effectiveness (1)**

90% of the 2,268 community survey respondents are overall satisfied with PDOP. 91% of respondents said programs were either excellent or good and 94% of respondents had visited a park during the past year, significantly higher than the Illinois average of nearly 80%.

Citizen Involvement (3 points) on the basis of

- **Level of Innovation/Innovative (1)**
- **Range and Depth of Actions (1)**
- **Perceived Level of Effectiveness (1)**

Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory contributed **\$350,000+** towards capital improvements and **6,000** volunteer hours in just the last 5 years. Four citizen advisory committees contributed over 350 hours of volunteer time in 2014 to projects such as scholarship program advocacy, Environmental Policy oversight, securing and placement of public art in the parks, and outreach to the Oak Park senior population. Additionally, over 8,800 surveys have been collected from the community since launching new survey software in 2013.

Staff Engagement (3 points) on the basis of Level of Outstanding/Innovative

Interdepartmental staff committees developed our new website, contributed to the performance measurement program development and ongoing implementation, organize the annual Frank Lloyd Wright Races, implement new customer service initiatives, and oversee safety practices. The new Innovation Committee established Launchpad, a portal where staff can post and vote on ideas to improve our organization. Ongoing staff survey results are used to make decisions related to organization benefits, processes and professional development opportunities. PDOP spends approximately \$60,000 annually on staff training opportunities. Staff participates in agency strategic and park planning processes.

Question 4: 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 the benefit and how the results were secured. (210 word max)

The 2013 Comprehensive Outdoor Athletic Field Plan was developed to help identify resources needed to meet the high demand on our community's limited land resources. As a result, a turf expert was hired and we installed 2 recommended synthetic turf fields with a third one in the planning stages. Staff and sports affiliates have seen a significant improvement in field playability, fewer game cancellations, and a decreased need for alternate fields outside of Oak Park.

A result of careful planning and a bond issue, PDOP constructed the Gymnastics and Recreation Center in 2013 to meet the growing need for gymnastics in our community. With over 50% growth in participation since its opening, the gymnastics program crossed the \$1 million revenue mark in 2014.

In 2012, with a goal of improving our existing scholarship program and provide additional financial assistance, the Park District partnered with the local school district to streamline the application process and directly reach families in need. This effort resulted in \$32,804.75 total scholarship funds redeemed in 2014, compared to almost \$9,425 in 2010, assisting 153 families or 412 total individuals – roughly 10% of the Oak Park population at or below the poverty level.

Question 5: Park and recreation agencies have long been known for the creative and innovative ways they manage 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 three innovations used or implemented by your agency within the last three years. (Total Max Word Count – 240)

PDOP launched a performance measurement program to track agency progress towards its strategic initiatives including meeting our mission, customer service, maintaining our infrastructure, staff and organizational excellence and fiscal strength. Results are streamed live to staff through the use of dashboards connected directly to District registration, financial, human resources, time clock, maintenance, and surveying software programs so staff has up-to-the-minute data at their fingertips to make informed and immediate responses to trends. Much of this data is shared live with the public on our website.

Staff developed a custom Park Report Card tool to evaluate the quality of park maintenance and infrastructure. The annual results allow us to more efficiently prioritize maintenance activities and capital improvements to ensure the highest level of service to the community. By benchmarking against prior year results, we can ensure that we are positively impacting park patron experiences.

The District redesigned its website to maximize customer service. The new site includes improved navigation, a dynamic search option, an RFP and bidding system, non-emergency maintenance issue reporting, and a custom tool to notify residents of athletic field & facility closures. Residents simply sign up for an "E-Alert" and receive an e-mail within an hour of any

weather-related field or facility closing. Web visitors can check the availability of pools, ice rinks, sled hills, athletic fields, splash pads, sports courts and more. After launch, website registration increased 18% and the website won first place in a state competition.

Question 6: In what ways has your agency in the last three years addressed the NRPA identified issue of social equity? (Maximum Word Count 120)

An ADA Transition Plan was developed in 2011 to eliminate barriers to accessibility at parks and facilities. Funds are budgeted annually for ongoing plan implementation.

PDOP is a founding member of the West Suburban Special Recreation Association providing recreation services for people with disabilities. In 2014, 182 Oak Park residents participated in 2,086 WSSRA programs and 52 residents participated in 138 PDOP programs with help from WSSRA inclusion aids. With WSSRA support, PDOP also offers a competitive gymnastics program for children with disabilities.

PDOP creates equity maps to determine level of service standards and ensure equal access to parks and programs for all.

Resident financial aid scholarships have significantly increased from \$9,947 in 2012 to \$32,804 in 2014.

Question 7: In what ways has your agency in the last three years addressed the NRPA identified issue of health and wellness? (Maximum Word count 120)

We provide health and wellness activities to over 21,000 program participants each year, ranging from Hike & Bike camps to 6 Weeks to a 5K training program. Our most recent seasonal program guide featured over 40 pages of active program opportunities.

We continue to encourage year-round outdoor physical activity by upgrading three outdoor ice rinks, installing two new synthetic turf fields, and publishing walking path distances for our parks.

We are an active partner in Oak Park's Wild About Wellness initiative, which includes cooking classes, walking and bike education programs, and dental programs, serving over 2,500 residents.

We recently worked with vending providers to ensure that a mix of healthy snacks and beverages are offered at all PDOP facilities.

Question 8: In what ways has your agency in the last three years addressed the NRPA identified issue of Conservation? Maximum word count 120

Pending approval, our ice/pool facility will be the first of its kind granted Silver LEED certification in Illinois. We are pursuing Platinum LEED certification for construction of an environmental education center.

PDOP is partnering with our Village to become one of only 6 municipal arboretums in the country and works with the Heritage Oak Propagation Program to preserve 200- to 300-year-old oak trees.

PDOP maintains all athletic fields through organic methods.

We promote a Carry In, Carry Out program, encouraging park visitors and sports affiliates to carry reusable water bottles and recycle any disposables at home.

Each year, approximately 27,000 visitors enjoy the Oak Park Conservatory, 80 tours are conducted, and over 30 environmental classes and camps are offered.

Question 9: What challenges have your community and/or agency experienced over the past 3 years and what steps or actions have you taken to resolve these challenges. (Maximum word count 210)

Challenged with serving 5,000+ sports participants annually on only 82.5 acres, PDOP developed a facility use and allocation management program to ensure the fair distribution of space while protecting District resources.

Operating under a tax cap, PDOP actively seeks out innovative program opportunities to grow revenue through fees and charges. We have increased non-tax revenue steadily to 44% in 2014 with a goal of 50% by 2020. We continue to identify new revenue opportunities such as expanded afterschool care and family activities, flexible fitness passes, year-round ice and multi-tiered gymnastics offerings.

Faced with limited facility space for gymnastics programs and maintenance operations and an obsolete rink & pool facility, PDOP issued a series of bonds to renovate our rink & pool facility, build a new Gymnastics & Recreation Center to serve hundreds of wait-listed children, purchase an outdoor storage facility and transform our old gymnastics center into an expanded B&G facility, all without increasing taxes.

After exhausting all possible locations within Oak Park to create a large dog park desired by our community, PDOP partnered with the Cook County Forest Preserve in their master planning efforts to create a "Dog Grove" within close proximity to Oak Park which will open this fall.