

**Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association
State Association Governance
Final Report
April 30, 2007**

Executive Summary

The Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association (WPRA) issued an RFP (request for proposal) and subsequently contracted with CeJay Associates, LLC, (CeJay) to conduct a review of the current governance structure of the State Association and provide recommendations for review at the May 9th WPRA Board Meeting.

CeJay reviewed the existing materials on the website and supplemental data provided by the WPRA, contacted selected Board, Section, and Focus Group Members, evaluated the existing data, and formulated recommendations concerning the RFP requirements.

It is our observation that the Board, Sections, Regions, and membership are very committed and dedicated to the success of the organization. There is a universal desire, evidenced during our interviews, in the large survey response, and the high volume of comments, to help take the WPRA to the next level, using best practices and current technology.

The existing WPRA governance structure was designed approximately 40 years ago. This was also prior to having a paid staff, and without modern, instant mass-communication. Considering this, along with current downsizing trends in governance for Not-for-Profit and For-Profit Boards, coupled with the results of your WPRA survey, and the recommendations from your Focus Group, CeJay recommends the following:

Board Size

Option One (appendix – Option #1)

Reduce the Board of Directors to 10 voting members and 1 non-voting member.
Including two new At-Large Board positions included: Fund Raising, Public Relations

Option Two (appendix – Option #2)

Option #2 is the same as Option #1, but not including the Fund Raising and Public Relations positions, thereby reducing the Board of Director to 8 voting members and 1 non-voting member.

Executive Committee

Combine the Executive Committee functions with the main Board, thereby eliminating the Executive Committee.

Task Force

Establish a Board Task Force to determine the best sub-committee structure for moving forward with a smaller, more efficient Board.

Terms

The President, President Elect, Past President and Executive Director remain the same. All other Board positions will be termed for two years.

Communication

Institute a comprehensive goal to improve communications to the overall membership.

By-Laws

Change the By-Laws to reflect these suggested changes.

Approach

CeJay reviewed the available materials from the website, additional data provided by the WPRA, briefly interviewed selected Board, Section, and Focus Group Members, evaluated the existing data, and made its recommendations.

Given that the WPRA had conducted a considerable amount of primary research, new primary research was not requested as part of this project. CeJay did feel it was necessary to contact as many Board and Focus Group members as practical to gain first-hand opinions and recommendations.

The RFP given to CeJay includes the following components:

- Review and assess the current size and responsibilities of each of the current WPRA Board of Director positions
- Determine if any alternative Board structures would be more effective for the State Association
- Review and assess the current size and responsibilities of each of the current WPRA Executive Committee positions
- Determine if any alternative Executive Committee structures would be more effective for the State Association
- Conduct a review and assess the Section Board and Committee structure of the State Association
- Determine if any alternative Section Board and Committee structures would be more effective for the State Association
- Review the Bylaws, Policies and Guidelines of the State Association to determine if any changes and/or updates should be incorporated based on the above findings

Given the interdependence of the last three RFP components, approximately 80% of the effort by CeJay was focused on:

- WPRA Board of Directors – current size and responsibilities, and resulting structure

- WPRA Executive Committee – current size and responsibilities, and resulting structure

Methodology

1. CeJay reviewed the following existing documents:

- Committee Structure and Duties noted on the website
- By-Laws of the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association, Inc.
- Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association Annual Report
- Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association Fiscal Year 2007 Strategic Plan Tactics
- Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association 2007 Organizational Handbook
- Wisconsin Parks and Recreation Association Organization Chart
- Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association 2007 Policies Manual
- Minutes of the March 7, 2007 Board Meeting
- Questions and comments raised by members while they were completing the WPRA Organizational Assessment Survey
- Organizational Assessment Survey Results
- Results of Organizational Assessment Survey/Focus Group Recommendations (WPRA Focus Group Report Organizational Survey, October 17, 2006)
- Document ‘Your Responsibilities as a Board Member’
- Other relevant information found on the website

2. Based on questions provided to WPRA and subsequent guidance, CeJay conducted brief interviews with:

- Roger Kist - President
- Joe McLafferty – President Elect
- Cyndi Keller – Past President
- Yvonne Monfils, Secretary
- Steve Thompson – Executive Director
- Juliene Hefter – Deputy Director
- Justin Casperson – Aquatic Section
- Robert Rafel – Parks Section
- Brett Altergott – Recreation Section
- Kristin Ruprecht – WTRS
- Tom Kautz – Emeritus Section
- Maria Andersen – Student Section Advisor
- Michelle Tiffany – Student Section
- Steve Peterson – Region I
- Niki Wendt – Region II
- Jim Mattke – Region III
- Dave Jeske – Region IV
- Bill Lecker – Focus Group
- Pat Grulke – Focus Group
- Bob Holling – Focus Group

3. CeJay reviewed the 2006 Organizational Assessment Survey and the Results of Organizational Assessment Survey/Focus Group Recommendations.

The President authorized the 2006 Organizational Assessment Survey to obtain input from the WPRA members. (According to the staff, approximately 1000 members had email addresses of the 1200 total members.) Responses were obtained from 462 individuals, 46.2% of those with email addresses, a high outcome for surveys of this type.

Responders to surveys are generally either very happy with the survey subject or very unhappy. People with moderate feelings typically don't respond. The results of this survey are clear on most of the issues. For example, the results were overwhelming regarding Board size: 402 of 462 members (87%) want a significant reduction in Board size. What makes this survey unique is that such a large percentage of the population responded and provided comments.

In our experience, response rates for customer surveys range from 15 to 30%. The 46.2% WPRA response rate is high. Further, the quantity and detail contained in the comments are unusually high. This indicates dedication to the WPRA and a desire to contribute; e.g. almost half of the membership 'weighed in' on the issues.

Online surveys have many advantages:

- Poll the entire audience (those that have access to email)
- Avoids sample size issues – allows input from a large portion of the membership, 1000 of 1200 members or 83.3%
- Elimination of sample selection characteristics – demographics, biases
- Facilitates comments – difficult and costly to do with in-person or telephone surveys
- Anonymous
- Consistency of message – no concerns about whether a telephone interviewer followed the script
- Quick
- Cost-effective from a Human Resource perspective and cash outlay

4. CeJay reviewed best practice data for several states, the National Recreation and Park Association Board, and other Not-for-Profit and For-Profit organizations. We observed the trend toward smaller, more effective boards.

Recommendations

The seven bullet points in the RFP can be grouped into four basic components. We will address each one. There are significant interdependencies. The WPRA Board's decision and action will need to be reflected in the By-Laws and related documents. Given the scope of this project, recommendations were made that are within the purview of the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association, Inc. and should not need interaction with the National Recreation and Park Association.

It is CeJay's recommendation that, because of the magnitude of the suggested changes and the impact to the overall future operation of the WPRA, the decision to change the structure of the governance of the WPRA be voted on by the entire WPRA organization.

The voting should be preceded by an information campaign, utilizing email and regular mail. It should be reviewed at the Regions and Sections meetings. CeJay recommends using the Impact Magazine to explain the issues:

- Use one issue to provide education
- Consider including the ballots or proxy votes in a second issue, as an alternative to mail.

WPRA Board of Directors

Option 1

Fold the function-related Section Members (Aquatic, Park, Recreation, and WTRS) into the Four Regions. Add two (2) new At-Large voting members. The 2 new voting members will allow the recruiting of special expertise positions, Fundraising and Public Relations.

We further suggest that the Student Section, Student Advisor, and Emeritus roles be removed from Board Positions and reassigned to report to the President, Past President, and President-Elect Board members, respectively.

It was noted during the interview process that student participation on the Board is a beneficial training experience; allowing exposure to the WPRA, an opportunity to learn the governance process, and should lead to future leadership participation in the WPRA. However, the way governance is currently configured, it is possible that a student vote might be the deciding vote on a key issue.

These changes will reduce the Board to ten voting and one non-voting members.

Option 2

Option #2 is the same as option #1, except that the two new At Large Board members (Fundraising, Public Relations) are not added.

These changes will reduce the Board to eight voting and one non-voting members.

These options create fewer Board-level voting positions to allow the Board to focus on its primary responsibilities as set forth in the document, “Your Responsibilities as a Board Member”. These responsibilities include: “setting policy, guiding long-range planning and development (3-5 year goals), raising money, and monitoring finances.”

The day-to-day management activities shall be done by the Executive Director and his/her staff. (In the survey comments, many observed that the Board gets too involved with daily operations.)

The combination of more efficient Board positions with slightly longer terms in office creates more continuity that will lead to a higher sense of accomplishment and facilitates recruiting people who want to contribute their talent and skills in a meaningful way.

It is the recommendation of CeJay that Option #1 be selected. The Board should be downsized to an 11-member Board immediately, (10 voting members, 1 non-voting member) including the two new positions of Fundraising and Public Relations, along with the elimination of the Executive Committee.

Because of the magnitude of these changes, we recommend that the entire association be given the opportunity to decide by vote for one of the above two options.

It is also clear from the survey results and the interviews that there is a considerable need and opportunity to better communicate with the Members. In our experience, association members tend to view their leaders and governing bodies as ineffective if those members do not have a full understanding of the direction the organization is going, the functions of their duties and how well they are carrying out these responsibilities.

We recommend using current web technology to improve communication with members. Several of the following ideas can be used to encourage community building within WPRAs:

- In-depth, comprehensive education, in the promotion of and training in the use of electronic communication; such as email and using WPRAs-related Internet websites
- Periodic, dependable email newsletters (monthly)
- Blogs (web logs) and/or Forums, operated by the staff, Sections, and/or Regions
- Emailing meeting minutes
- Web pages within the WPRAs website for Sections, and/or Regions
- Wikis – particularly for the Sections and Regions. (A Wiki is a website that allows different people to collaborate, sharing content, adding notes, editing information. There are a number of Wiki software applications, for example Wetpaint.com, a free package reviewed in the Apr. 25th Wall Street Journal.)

We also recommend that, per the document “Your Responsibilities as a Board Member”, the Board develop and promulgate a three- or five-year plan with annual goals. We suggest publishing these Board goals, and then reporting the accomplishments per these goals at annual meetings. This will show movement toward best practices and give Membership a better understanding of Board activities.

Terms of Office: We recommend coordinating all the Terms of Office of Board members to two years, with the exception of the terms of office for the President, President Elect, Past President, and Executive Director, which will remain as they are currently.

Responsibilities

A review of the responsibilities presented in the “Your Responsibilities as a Board Member” indicates a fairly standard set of future strategic goals for the Board. Certainly, for the next 12-18 months, these responsibilities seem satisfactory.

To respond to many survey comments about efficiency and focus, we suggest that the components in the list of Board Responsibilities are already adequately delineated, but that the Board should focus on strategic issues and not mechanics.

For example, responsibility “Guiding Long-Range Planning and Development”, combined with the responsibility “Obligations of the Board”, might be interpreted to require the establishment, maintenance, and updating of a 3- to 5-year Strategic Plan. While there is a “Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association Fiscal Year 2007 Strategic Plan Tactics” document covering 2007, a longer term Strategic Plan has not been completed.

If Option 2 is selected, the WPRA should consider recruiting people to help with specific high-level areas; such as fundraising, public relations, commercial memberships, etc. Another short-term alternative would be to enhance the Deputy Director's ability to do fundraising by adding a staff member to assist with his/her administrative duties.

Fundraising

Fundraising is the backbone of any Not-for-Profit organization. Without multiple sources of assured income, an organization's ability to provide predictable levels of service for its members, and therefore its future, can be in jeopardy. For many people, fundraising is not their preferred responsibility. CeJay recommends that, due to its importance, the fundraising role should be a Board level position, filled with a person who is skilled in this field, as set forth in Option 1.

Fundraising duties can range from making sure that WPRA price points keep up with inflation, to recruiting corporate sponsors, getting commercial members, and creating an endowment fund.

If this new Board member position is not created, then specific goals and objectives must be assigned to all Board members and the meeting of these goals and objectives be given a high priority.

The people tasked with raising funds should be provided with strategic guidance and profiles/criteria by the Board of desirable companies and individuals, contribution/donation levels, direction on one-time vs. repeatable monies, acceptable solicitation techniques, established annual target amounts, and other strategies acceptable to pursue.

Public Relations

Public relations are also one of the more important functions in a Not-for-Profit organization. This is normally a Board function and is concerned with building a consistent, favorable image around the WPRA brand and its activities. It can range from developing a simple branding statement, to the look and feel of the website, the experience that members, prospective members, sponsors, commercial members (customers) have when they touch the organization, to obtaining news coverage, gaining speaker slots at important conferences, and providing an image that helps recruit members. With a good public relations program, fundraising objectives become much more achievable.

WPRA Executive Committee

CeJay suggests the combining of the Executive Committee function with the main Board, thereby eliminating the Executive Committee entirely.

The following reasons are offered:

- With the number of voting Board members reduced, the need for a 'Board within a Board' is also reduced. To have such a large percentage of the Board effectively talking to itself at the regular board meeting is an inefficient use of time and talent.
- Having a 'Board within a Board' can disenfranchise the non-EC members.
- Under the By-Laws, the EC is responsible for Personnel and the Budget. Overseeing a small team of people (one of them fulfills a three-year contract) will not be too cumbersome and is certainly important enough for the entire Board to consider. The

- budget is also of interest to the entire Board, and should be considered by the whole rather than a smaller committee.
- The Board should have the various committees currently assigned to Board Liaison roles continue to report to the Past President, President Elect, Secretary/Treasurer, and Executive Director.

WPRA New Board Structure Task Force

The impact on the Committees will be dependent on which option is selected. It is our recommendation that the Board assign a Task Force to review the functions of the replaced Sections, Board positions and Committees to determine the new alignments and roles.

In both of the alternatives suggested above, the Sections are being folded into Regions. Currently each Section has a Regional Representative. These should perform reverse representation. For example, the current Region Representative IV to the Aquatic Section could become the Aquatic Representative to Region IV.

If the selected option includes creating the new 2 At-Large Board members, new roles and responsibilities will need to be defined. The Board should consider the definition of these roles as part of the evaluation process for the newly appointed task force.

By-Laws of the WPRA, Policies and Guidelines of the State Association

The By-Laws, Policies and Guidelines of the State Association will have to be reviewed to reflect all of the changes being made.

Observation by CeJay Associates

We observed throughout this project that the Board, Section, Region, and Membership are very committed and dedicated to the success of the organization. There is a universal desire, evidenced during our interviews, in the large survey response and high volume of comments, to help take the WPRA to the next level using best practices and current technology.

Due to the obvious commitment and dedication witnessed throughout this project, we feel that the changes and the opportunity to participate in their selection will be well received by the majority of the membership.

CeJay Associates, LLC thanks the WPRA for the opportunity to contribute to the organization's move forward with a streamlined governance group, enhanced communications, and the commitment to a stronger future.