

# Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

## Career Center Tips: **Tips for Park & Recreation Executives Seeking Jobs**



Recent economic woes have struck a severe blow to the nation's work force -- penetrating as high as the top tiers of corporate America. As the economy becomes increasingly shaky and companies are forced to trim budgets, executive-level and management positions have become more vulnerable than ever. The Park and Recreation industry has clearly become part of this vulnerability.

Considered by many to be "untouchable," hundreds of upper-level park and recreation professionals have been thrust into unemployment and have discovered that today's job market is much harder to navigate than in previous years. Now, the market is flooded with candidates just as highly skilled and experienced as the next. In addition, finding a job that can match -- if not improve upon -- a prior position can seem incredibly daunting due to many companies' growing financial limitations.

To stand out from their competition and prove that they offer a high return on investment, **executive**-level park and recreation job seekers need certain tools, including the essential job-search documents needed to market oneself in the job hunt, plus a few others to achieve an advantage over competitors.

There's no question that the executive résumé and cover letter are the foundations of your career-search plan. However, you'll want to give careful consideration to some additional tools that are capable of providing significant leverage in your search.

The WPRA Career Center encourages job seekers pursuing leadership positions in the park and recreation industry to create and implement the following tools in their job search:

### **Elevator speech**

An "elevator speech" is a 30-second summary (the time you have if you run into a potential employer on an elevator) that briefly introduces individuals to those who can help them in the job search. Many park and recreation managers and executives have probably already developed and delivered this type of speech to people several times throughout their careers, but may need to adjust it to reflect their new goals.

Job seekers must convey four key elements throughout their introduction, including who they are, what they do, what they're seeking and any other key information relevant to their experience or job search goals.

In addition to knowing how to develop this tool, it's essential for job seekers to know when to use it. A good rule of thumb is to always be prepared with an elevator speech. They can be useful at networking events, clubs and associations; during "cold" phone calls; as well as at personal events such as weddings, dinners and any type of impromptu opportunity.

### **Networking script**

Networking is the key to finding good jobs quickly, which is why having a plan for networking situations is critical. While these conversations will all be unique and should feel genuine, it helps for job seekers to outline a few key points they'd like to address during the conversation. For example, job seekers will want to ask questions such as, "What ideas or referrals might you have for me?" "What related industries can you think of, and contacts do you know, where these skills might prove valuable?" or "Who in your network might be interested in someone with my [leadership](#) experience and background?"

### **Leadership initiative document**

This one- to two-page document is a relatively new tool park and recreation executive job seekers are using to further market their achievements and leadership experience. Typically, this document lists three to five career-defining stories that describe a specific situation or challenge, tactics and actions implemented to address the problem and results achieved. Ideally, these stories should reflect what the job seeker would hope to accomplish in the new position.

After crafting this document, job seekers can use it several ways. It can become a leave-behind document following interviews or meetings, a follow-up piece to a résumé and an additional component to the traditional résumé/cover letter package.

### **Professional biography**

This tool provides more extensive information about the job seeker; it is ideal for portfolios or personal Web sites and used as a tool for [recruiters](#) to use when introducing or advancing the candidate to a company or organization. After the job search, this document is still useful and often used for company news releases, marketing materials and Web sites, as well as for public-speaking engagements.

### **Targeted search summary**

This document identifies employers and industries in which the job seeker is interested. This tool comes in extremely handy at networking meetings where others may appreciate a visual reminder of where the job seeker's interests and opportunities are.

While each of these components of the job search can be extremely beneficial to job seekers, park and recreation executives are warned not to overload [hiring managers](#) and [recruiters](#) with too much information. Instead, carefully select and present only the documents that will stimulate their interest in you and your professional capabilities.