

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Chicago Park District's Methods for Receiving and Utilizing Program Participant Feedback

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PETER NEUMER | INSPECTOR GENERAL
DANIEL N. LOPEZ | DIRECTOR OF AUDIT

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Acronyms

NPD	Naperville Park District
NRPA	National Recreation and Park Association
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PAC	Park Advisory Council
PDOP	Park District of Oak Park
P.L.A.Y.	Girls Day of P.L.A.Y. (Positivity, Leadership, Ambition, Be You) Event
RMPD	Rolling Meadows Park District
SPD	Schaumburg Park District
U.S. GAO	United States Government Accountability Office

I. Executive Summary

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit of the Chicago Park District's (District) methods for receiving and utilizing formal participant feedback related to the District's programming. The District offers expansive programming for all ages across the City of Chicago. In 2024, the District hosted over 26,600 programs, including sports, aquatics, camps, cultural, and environmental activities.¹ Within these programs, there were almost 350,000 registrations, including approximately 74,000 adult registrations and 126,000 youth registrations.² Best practices recommend surveying program participants as a data source to inform programming decisions and provide feedback for relevant staff.

Currently, the District does not have a systematic process that provides participants a formal opportunity to evaluate District programs. More specifically, the District offers two programs, Summer Day Camp and Girls Day of P.L.A.Y. that have a participant or parent/guardian evaluation component in the form of an end-of-program survey. For the remaining programming, though, the District only captures informal commentary and utilizes internal metrics, such as enrollment numbers, to evaluate and inform programming.

The goals of this report are to identify how the District would benefit from providing participants with an opportunity to formally evaluate programs through end-of-program surveys, as well as to be a resource to the District on best practices. Therefore, the OIG recommends the following:

1. The District should provide program participants an opportunity to provide formal feedback on the District's programming through end-of-program surveys that comport with best practices.
 - a. The District should establish the goals of these surveys, including determining what is to be learned from the surveys and identifying the actions the District would take based on the resulting feedback.
 - b. The District should consider content and structure when creating the survey, e.g., types of questions, order of questions, language, etc., to help ensure higher response rates. The District should further allow for internal review and revisions of the surveys, as appropriate.

¹ The OIG referenced the District's 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for programming information and data, as the 2025 Report was not available when drafting this report. Chicago Park District, "Chicago Park District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report For the Year Ended December 31, 2024," September 25, 2025, accessed March 12, 2026, https://files.chicagoparkdistrict.com/2025-10/Chicago%20Park%20District%2024%20ACFR_Final.pdf?VersionId=luZuLEP6ZmQ1iFCMMQUhYrGMn_8GAQtV.

² Chicago Park District, "Chicago Park District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report For the Year Ended December 31, 2024," September 25, 2025, accessed March 12, 2026, https://files.chicagoparkdistrict.com/2025-10/Chicago%20Park%20District%2024%20ACFR_Final.pdf?VersionId=luZuLEP6ZmQ1iFCMMQUhYrGMn_8GAQtV.

- c. The District should identify the survey population by identifying what programs are being evaluated and how often. For example, the District should consider if a sampling of programs, as other park districts have done, is a more appropriate approach rather than evaluating all programs after every session.
 - d. The District should determine which mechanism for survey distribution, e.g., e-mail, website posting, etc., best meets the District's needs.
 - e. The District should ensure survey results are meaningfully reviewed and analyzed.
 - f. The District should ensure survey results are communicated internally and externally, as needed, including to park supervisors, to help inform programming decisions.
 - g. The District should identify an appropriate timeline for creating, distributing, and analyzing the program surveys. The timeline should ensure staff receives the surveys in a timely manner for distribution, as well as ensure sufficient time to meaningfully review the results of the surveys and enact any changes for future program sessions.
2. The District should evaluate the District's capacity to create, distribute, and analyze program participant surveys and communicate subsequent survey results in order to determine if external partners are required. The District should further formalize policies and procedures regarding program surveys and clearly delineate which entities are responsible for which parts of the process.

The Department of Community Recreation (Community Recreation) agreed with both of the OIG's recommendations.

In response to Recommendation 1, Community Recreation acknowledged the importance of establishing a formal, systemic approach to collecting program participant feedback, while also noting barriers to implementation, including not currently having a dedicated survey tool or staff member who is responsible for analyzing survey results. Community Recreation stated the Department is in the planning stages for implementing a phased approach to setting up end-of-program surveys that are aligned with NRPA best practices and meet national accreditation standards through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). Phase 1 of Community Recreation's implementation is intended to focus on foundational work in FY2026 by establishing survey goals, developing a standardized survey template, identifying a survey population, piloting the surveys in select programs, determining a feasible survey distribution mechanism, and ensuring information is communicated back to the appropriate Community Recreation staff. Phase 2, intended for FY2027, includes expanding sampling and automation.

In response to Recommendation 2, Community Recreation stated the Department recognizes that a sustainable program evaluation system requires an assessment of internal capacity. Community Recreation further stated they have developed a document that includes a capacity assessment as well as a proposed governance structure for any future end-of-program survey system that outlines the functions of the survey, methods of distribution,

analysis, and reporting on the survey findings. Community Recreation aims to use the information throughout FY2026 and FY2027 as the basis for formalizing policies and procedures surrounding end-of-program surveys, as well as to determine if external partnerships or platform investments will be necessary.

II. Background

The Chicago Park District (District) offers expansive programming for all ages across the City of Chicago. Best practices indicate that park and recreation agencies should provide an opportunity for participants to provide feedback on programming which, in turn, can help the agencies evaluate such programming. The following presents an overview of program evaluation, why it is recommended for park programs, and, finally, an overview of District programming.

A. Program Evaluations

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (U.S. GAO) defines program evaluation as “a systemic study using research methods to collect and analyze data to assess how well a program is working and why.”³ While there is no standard definition of a program, programs may include an activity, project, function, or policy that has an identified purpose to be met. Program evaluations can utilize a variety of data, including survey results from program participants. Reasons agencies should engage with program evaluation include, but are not limited to:

- Determining the economy, effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of a program's operations;
- Identifying a program's impact;
- Instilling a culture of continuous learning to facilitate program improvement;
- Strengthening program management;
- Seeking answers about the implementation of the program;
- Informing resource allocation.

Specific to evaluating park programming, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) identifies a need to evaluate community satisfaction with park programming. The NRPA states that the evaluation of programs (and parks) helps “determine if services [an] agency is providing are making an impact and meet the needs of your community.”⁴

While there are a variety of ways to measure and evaluate programs, surveys provide a “self-reported record of park activity.”⁵ Successful surveys are more than just asking questions; the specific questions asked and how an agency reaches out to respondents can have a significant impact on the survey's effectiveness. Park districts often use surveys to collect public input for planning, assess community needs, and solicit feedback on a program.

³ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Designing Evaluations 2012 Revision,” January 2012, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-12-208g.pdf>.

⁴ National Recreation and Park Association, “Determining Your Capacity for Evaluation,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/8e69f469a48747d583225c638f3b0e47/determining-your-capacity-for-evaluation.pdf>.

⁵ National Recreation and Park Association, “Recommended Measures to Evaluate Park Use and Quality,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/87a651f66deb46c89eabb36c5dec0a43/measures-evaluate-park-use-quality.pdf>.

Agencies that make decisions based on community feedback produce “higher quality park and recreation... programming attuned to local needs.”⁶

B. Chicago Park District Programs

The District hosts programs throughout the calendar year for participants of all ages to enjoy. In 2024, the District hosted over 26,600 programs, including sports, aquatics, camps, cultural, and environmental activities.⁷ Within these programs, there were 347,083 registrations, including at least 73,797 adult registrations and 125,963 youth registrations.⁸

1. Types of District Programs

Figure 1, below, provides a breakdown of the different types of programs offered by the District:

⁶ National Recreation and Park Association, “Customer Feedback Surveys,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/>.

⁷ The OIG referenced the District’s 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for programming information and data, as the 2025 Report was not available when drafting this report.

Chicago Park District, “Chicago Park District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report For the Year Ended December 31, 2024,” September 25, 2025, accessed March 12, 2026, https://files.chicagoparkdistrict.com/2025-10/Chicago%20Park%20District%2024%20ACFR_Final.pdf?VersionId=luZuLEP6ZmQ1iFCMMQUhYrGMn_8GAQtV.

⁸ Chicago Park District, “Chicago Park District Annual Comprehensive Financial Report For the Year Ended December 31, 2024,” September 25, 2025, accessed January 26, 2026, https://files.chicagoparkdistrict.com/2025-10/Chicago%20Park%20District%2024%20ACFR_Final.pdf?VersionId=luZuLEP6ZmQ1iFCMMQUhYrGMn_8GAQtV.

FIGURE 1: Types of Programming Offered by the Chicago Park District

Program Category	Examples of Programs	Season(s) Offered	Age Groups
Aquatics	Aquatic exercise classes, lap swims, open swims, rowing, sailing, specialized classes, and swim lessons.	All seasons	18 months or older
Arts and Culture	Creative writing, dance, decorative arts, drawing, literary art, music, painting, photography, “PrintMaking,” sculpture, textiles, theater, and woodworking.	All seasons	All ages
Camps	Day camps, general interest camps, special interest camps, and sport camps.	All seasons	Children
Gymnastics	Recreational gymnastics, recreational tumbling, and competitive gymnastics.	All seasons	Early childhood, youth, and teens
Nature	Nature education, gardening, youth and family camping, harvesting, and fishing.	All seasons	All ages
ParkKids After-School Programs	After-school programs with activities that may include sports, games, arts and crafts, nature, fitness/wellness, brain play, and homework time.	Follows Chicago Public School Calendar	Ages 6-12
Special Interest	Clubs, education/self-help, fun and games, and self-defense.	All seasons	All ages
Sports	Competitive or recreational leagues for activities such as baseball, basketball, officiating, track and field, hockey, skating, soccer, and wrestling.	All seasons	All ages
Wellness	Aerobics, nutrition classes, yoga, fitness, and walking.	All seasons	All ages
Early Childhood Education	Art and ABCs, Kiddie College, Play School, Moms Pops and Tots, and Dino Diggers.	All seasons	Ages 5 and under
Special Recreation	Adaptive sports and recreation for individuals with intellectual disabilities or developmental delays, or with a primary physical disability; recreation programming for active military members or veterans.	All seasons	All ages

Source: Adapted from specific categories under “Programs” on the Chicago Park District website, <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/>.⁹

⁹ Chicago Park District, “Programs,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/>.

2. Day Camps and Girls Day of P.L.A.Y.

The District offers two programs, Summer Day Camp (Camp) and Girls Day of P.L.A.Y. (P.L.A.Y.), that have a participant or parent/guardian evaluation component in the form of an end-of-program survey (*see infra* Section IV.A for more information).

Camp is six weeks of programming offered at multiple parks across Chicago every summer that includes sports, arts, fitness, and outdoor activities. At the end of Camp, parents/guardians are given the opportunity to provide feedback on the program through an online feedback survey. These surveys ask the parents/guardians of participants to share what they believe is and is not working, what they enjoy, and what they want to see improved.

P.L.A.Y. launched in 2018 to expand opportunities for girls in sports, ensuring equal access to recreational offerings in their communities. P.L.A.Y. creates tailored programming, special events, and camps that provide opportunities for girls to create long-lasting healthy physical activity habits. In 2024, 2,366 girls participated in P.L.A.Y. events across 56 locations.¹⁰ As part of some P.L.A.Y. events, participants and their parent/guardians are given the opportunity to provide feedback about the program through a survey.

3. Park Level Staffing

Programming is overseen by various departments at the District and facilitated at local parks. Local parks can be staffed by seasonal positions, instructors, playground supervisors, park supervisors, and sometimes an area manager or a region director. Within the Department of Community Recreation (Community Recreation), a Deputy Chief Programming Officer oversees three region directors, one for each of the North, Center, and South Regions. Each region director oversees six area managers, making up the 18 park areas in the District. The area managers are responsible for overseeing the park supervisors for each of the parks within their area. Finally, park supervisors are responsible for any staff members, such as instructors or park attendants, working at the park, including those involved with programming.

Program offerings are approved at the park level. When creating the list of program offerings for a season, park supervisors will work with area managers to check enrollment numbers, staff availability, and ensure there is space for the programs to be held. In circumstances where a new program is being offered, the regional director is also involved in the creation process. Community Recreation utilizes an inputting calendar that identifies the beginning of each season and a calendar deadline for when the programs being offered need to be entered into the District's programming database, ActiveNet.

¹⁰ Chicago Park District, "Girls P.L.A.Y.," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/girls-play#2272436614-4219283874-1>.

III. Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

A. Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine how the Chicago Park District utilizes participant feedback to inform and improve District programming.

B. Scope

The scope of this audit included paid and free programming offered by the District, including one-off events, day programming, or extended programs, with the exception of youth training programs and job readiness or training programs, which are outside the audit's scope.

C. Methodology

The OIG utilized the following methodology to conduct this audit:

- Reviewed public feedback information portals such as Yelp or Reddit;
- Reviewed program enrollment data;
- Surveyed park supervisors and area managers;
- Hosted forums with park supervisors and area managers regarding current program evaluation practices;
- Interviewed members of the Department of Community Recreation, Department of Policy, and Department of Cultural and Natural Resources;
- Interviewed external jurisdictions and suburban park districts; including the Park District of Oak Park, Naperville Park District, Rolling Meadows Park District, and Schaumburg Park District;
- Researched and reviewed program evaluation best practices from the National Recreation and Park Association, the United States Government Accountability Office, Pew Research Center, and the United States Department of Education.

D. Standards

The OIG conducts performance audits with guidance from the United States Government Accountability Office's Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS or "Yellow Book," 2024 revision). Pursuant to the Yellow Book:

Performance audits provide objective analysis, findings, and conclusions to assist management and those charged with governance and oversight with, among other things, improving program performance and operations, reducing costs, facilitating decision making by parties

responsible for overseeing or initiating corrective action, and contributing to public accountability.¹¹

For other categories of work-product, such as advisories, explainers, notifications, and program descriptions, the Department follows the guidance set forth by the Association of Inspectors General in *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General* (“Green Book,” 2024 revision).¹²

E. Authority

The authority to perform this audit is established in Chapter II(D)(4) of the Chicago Park District Code, which states that the OIG has the power and duty to promote economy, efficiency, effectiveness and integrity in the administrations of programs and operations of the District by reviewing programs, identifying any inefficiencies, waste and potential for misconduct therein, and recommending policies and methods for the elimination of inefficiencies and waste, and for the prevention of misconduct.

¹¹ United States Government Accountability Office, “Government Auditing Standards 2024 Revisions,” February 2024, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24106786.pdf>.

¹² Association of Inspectors General, “Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General,” July 1, 2024, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://inspectorsgeneral.org/blog/newly-revised-aig-green-book-principles-and-standards-for-offices-of-inspector-general-is-now-available-for-download/>.

IV. Finding and Recommendations

The Chicago Park District can strengthen its methods of program evaluation by obtaining formal participant feedback via end-of-program surveys.

Park and recreation agencies can evaluate programs utilizing various methods; this report is about program evaluation opportunities specific to program participants. Currently, the District does not have a process that allows program participants to formally evaluate or provide feedback on District programs. While the District captures informal commentary and utilizes internal metrics such as enrollment numbers to evaluate programs, best practices recommend surveys as a method for informing and evaluating park programming. As one community member stated to the OIG,

Absolutely there need to be participant surveys sent out after programs end. My family has participated in a variety of programs at a variety of parks and there is no way to evaluate our experience at the end, so I always wonder how can these programs or instructors improve. Most are amazing, but I can't even report on those as a bright spot for other parks to look to for inspiration. The ones that are disappointing though.... I would really love for someone to know that an instructor is always unprepared or always late. There would be no risk involved, but there would be time spent in reading the surveys. BUT how amazing to be able to improve programs and instructors.

The goals of this report are to identify how the District would benefit from providing participants with an opportunity to formally evaluate programs through end-of-program surveys, as well as to be a resource to the District on best practices.

A. The Chicago Park District does not consistently offer participants a formal opportunity to provide feedback, via surveys, on District programming.

Aside from the Camps and P.L.A.Y. programming, the District does not consistently conduct surveys for its programming, e.g., athletics, aquatics, etc.¹³ Further, Community Recreation does not track whether individual parks or programs independently solicit participant feedback.

¹³ The District stated it also distributes surveys to participants of the District's Recreation Leader-In-Training program; this program is out-of-scope for this audit.

1. Day Camp Surveys

The District's Camps are among the District's most popular programs offered at approximately 200 parks. Community Recreation stated that enrollment is the main factor in determining if an individual day camp program is successful and acknowledged that very few Camps do not fill up. The District does also distribute surveys to participants' parents/guardians to give these parents/guardians an opportunity to share what is and what is not working, what participants enjoy, and what they want to see improved. One Area Manager stated that the survey, which used to be paper-based, is now distributed to parents/guardians via a QR code. According to Community Recreation, the day camp surveys, created with SurveyMonkey, generally inquire about basic information regarding the participants' experiences, and this broad inquiry can result in feedback on topics which are outside the Department's control, such as lunch meals, something that is dictated by external entities.

The District offers an incentive where parents/guardians who complete the survey are eligible to win a free entry to the following year's day camp programs. Despite this incentive, some park supervisors stated they struggle with gathering responses because they receive the survey for distribution days before Camp programming ends. One Supervisor stated that, in their experience, they receive the survey at "the last moment," up to one day before programming ends. Another Supervisor noted that the survey has not changed over time and, therefore, they would expect that the parks would receive the survey earlier.

Historically, the District's Department of Marketing (Marketing) managed the Camp survey; however, Community Recreation inherited the responsibilities for the survey in 2025. It is difficult to determine what impact, if any, this change has had on communicating survey results to park supervisors and other stakeholders. For example, one staff member of Community Recreation stated that when Marketing oversaw the surveys, they would provide a high-level overview of District-wide feedback, as the surveys are not specific to the park or area-level. An Area Manager stated that after Community Recreation reviews the survey results, Community Recreation provides the feedback to area managers who are, in turn, to disseminate this feedback to the appropriate park or personnel. Another Area Manager stated they will directly read the survey results and determine if there is a park that has received a lot of negative feedback. However, park supervisors stated they have typically not seen Camp survey results.

In addition to these standard District-wide surveys, some park supervisors conduct their own surveys for Camp participants, citing historically not receiving survey results as the reason for creating their own surveys. One Supervisor distributes a paper survey with three questions asking participants what they do and do not like. The Supervisor will then compile and review the answers. Another Supervisor stated they also send out their own Camp surveys and have found that they have better success with prompts, rather than open-ended questions. Still another Supervisor stated they survey their participants, i.e., children, to

account for the fact that the participants may have different perspectives than their parents/guardians.

2. Girls Day of P.L.A.Y. Surveys

Similar to Camps, enrollment data is the main factor the District uses in determining if P.L.A.Y. programming is successful. However, due to grant requirements, the District also surveys both P.L.A.Y. participants and their parents/guardians. Specifically, the grants require the District to show that P.L.A.Y. programs are carried out as intended for participants. These participant and parent/guardian surveys provide the District metrics to help evaluate the program, as well as provide data for the grant(s). However, Community Recreation stated the District does not consistently conduct these surveys, noting that the District conducted both participant and parent/guardian surveys during the Summer 2025 event, but not the September 2025 event (Marketing stated that P.L.A.Y. surveys began in February 2025).

The participant survey is paper-based and designed to be youth friendly and easy to understand. The survey asks participants to select the face that best reflects their feelings, e.g., a face with a smile or a frown in response to the question that asks, "Mark the face that best describes how you feel about the activities at [P.L.A.Y.]?" (see Appendix A for a copy of the P.L.A.Y. participant survey). Members of a designated District committee then input responses from the physical surveys into an electronic format for analysis. Community Recreation stated this process is a "large barrier" to successful response review as enrollment can number over one thousand participants, meaning that over one thousand paper-based surveys have to be entered into an online database, assuming every participant completes a survey.

The parent/guardian survey asks a combination of open and closed-ended questions, such as "What do you as a parent/guardian like best about [P.L.A.Y.]?" and "Has attending [P.L.A.Y.] motivated your child to play more sports? [Yes; No]" (see Appendix B for a copy of the P.L.A.Y. parent/guardian survey). Unlike the paper-based participant survey, the parent/guardian survey is distributed electronically, although Community Recreation noted the District has not had a lot of success with parents/guardians completing the survey.

3. Other District Programming

Despite not consistently distributing surveys for the District's other programming, District personnel, including park supervisors, area managers, and region directors acknowledged the benefits of surveys to evaluate what is working or not working in a program or to help inform program offerings.

As discussed previously, the District primarily uses enrollment data as a metric of success; however, the District does not consistently gather or analyze attendance data as an indicator

of success once the program has started.¹⁴ Additionally, in lieu of formal participant feedback, some District personnel stated they will receive informal feedback, including:¹⁵

- Talking and listening to people in park(s);
- Walk-ins from people who want to communicate what is going well, not going well, and what they would like to see in District programming;
- E-mail communication;
- Staff asking park patrons why a program is successful or struggling;
- Aldermanic offices communicating feedback they receive;
- Area manager meetings with their park supervisors to assess what the community wants;
- Informally reviewing if a program's enrollment was filled and if participants consistently attended that program (as noted above, this District does not formally gather and analyze attendance data; this example was an individual Area's initiative);
- Input from a Park Advisory Council (PAC), if a park has a PAC;
- Utilization of a suggestion box;
- Class observations.¹⁶

Some park supervisors conduct their own surveys to inform their respective parks' programming. One Supervisor noted that the length of time it can take for bureaucratic approval resulted in them creating their own survey.

Absent formal, consistent opportunities to provide feedback, community members have taken to forums such as Reddit and Yelp to voice their thoughts on District programming. Examples include:

- "My son took different classes in different parks around Chicago, but all the parks are the same. Pros: cheap classes. CONS: the "coaches" do [not] coach, they sit in a chair with their phones texting for 45 mins or if you are lucky to have two coaches, the[y] chat together and the kids play by themselves. the kids argue, fight, say bad words and the coaches doesn't say anything at all. They don't teach a class. It's like a cheap day care for an hour."
- "I've had mixed experiences with parks district camps."
- "[T]he instructors seem to be doing a good job."
- "Don't bother signing your kids up for programs here at Athletic Field Park. Well in particular the Golf program they offer. The instructor is supposed to teach the class from 2:30 pm to 3:15 and unfortunately she ends promptly at 3:00 pm. If it's drizzling outside she will cancel class and not offer to move indoors for the 45 minutes. Just not worth it."

¹⁴ Some suburban park districts stated they also use enrollment as a metric of a program's success.

¹⁵ The OIG uses the term "informal" to indicate feedback methods that are ad-hoc or otherwise are not consistently used within or among parks or programs.

¹⁶ Additionally, regarding certain situations for Special Recreation programming, if the District receives concerning feedback from a parent/guardian, the District will file an incident report which could result in disciplinary action.

- “The after-school program is amazing!! [The instructors] are so good!! Love the program and the park being next to the lake is perfect and so beautiful!”

It is important to note that should the District offer consistent, formal surveys, patrons may still take to forums to express their opinions; however, currently, this feedback is located in disparate locations and possibly never conveyed directly to the District.

4. Staff Evaluations

The District also does not evaluate its programming staff, including both physical instructors and activity instructors. One District staff member noted that evaluations can help determine what training a particular instructor may need. Another District staff member stated that the District sometimes hires people who are not qualified, noting that they see a knowledge gap between recreation leaders and instructors. Some park supervisors stated that surveys can be helpful for the development of instructors. One Supervisor stated that surveys can help address concerns with instructors who are not as engaged with their programming. Another noted that surveys would help “light a fire” for staff who require it, as well as recognizing good performance.

B. Best practices recommend surveying program participants as a data source to inform programming decisions and provide feedback for relevant staff.

According to the NRPA:

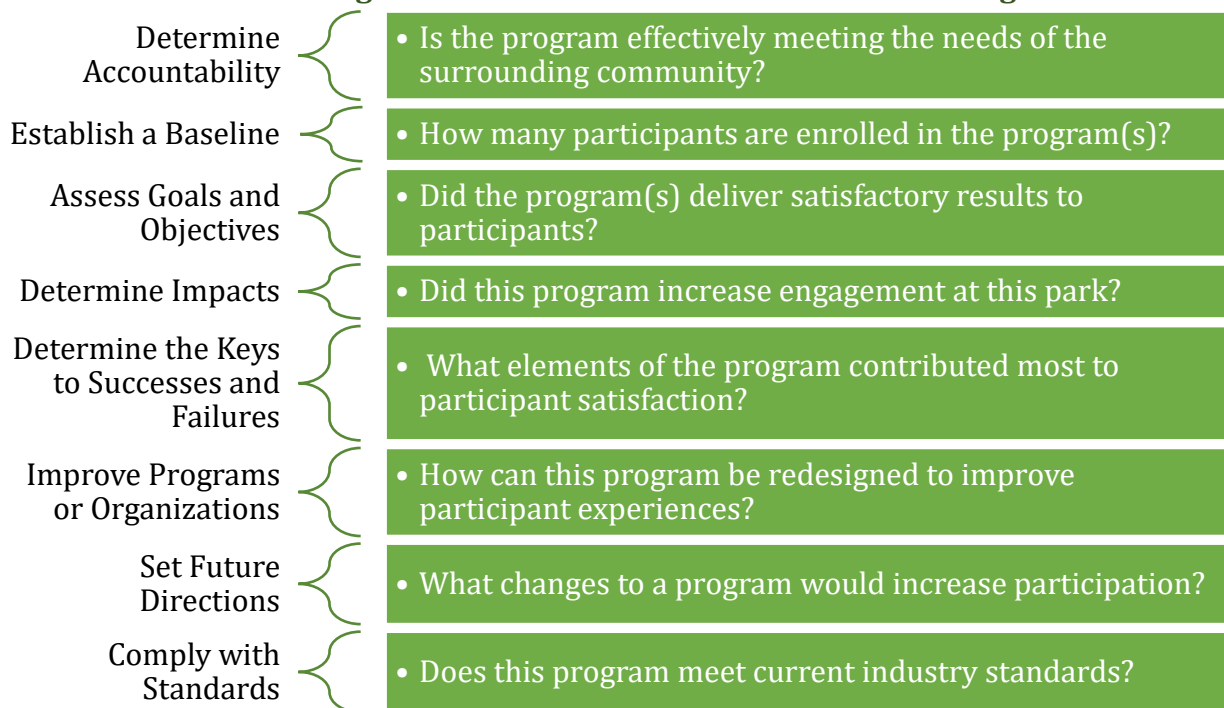
Park and recreation agencies that receive constructive feedback from both the users of park facilities and services and from the general public are likely to deliver offerings that are most relevant to local needs. Making decisions based on community feedback leads to higher quality park and recreation amenities and programming attuned to local needs. Highly engaged and satisfied residents are your agency's greatest advocates. They not only will encourage their family, friends, and neighbors to use your agency's amenities, but also will push local political leaders to support greater and more stable funding for your agency's operations.¹⁷

The NRPA also notes that “[i]n recent years, park and recreation professionals increasingly have been turning toward data analysis to help them make... informed programming decisions.”¹⁸ Further, “[t]he goal of any evaluation is to inform decisions or judgments based on systematically gathered evidence” and can aid park and recreation agencies in ways outlined in Figure 2, below:

¹⁷ National Recreation and Park Association, “Customer Feedback Surveys,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/>.

¹⁸ National Recreation and Park Association, “Using Data at Park & Recreation Agencies,” 2016, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/data-analysis-park-and-recreation.pdf>.

FIGURE 2: Benefits of Program Evaluations for Park and Recreation Agencies



Source: Adapted from the National Recreation and Park Association “Determining Your Capacity for Evaluation” resource.¹⁹

The U.S. GAO provides further guidance, stating that potential sources of evidence for evaluations, i.e., data, used for programming decisions include records and reports, performance monitoring data, observations, interviews, and surveys of program participants, all of which can help answer a “range of questions about programs to assist decision-making by program managers and policymakers.”²⁰

The NRPA specifies that the assessment of participant satisfaction with park programming is typically measured via surveys and concluded in a study that 89% of park and recreation agencies collected data by surveying residents to inform, among other metrics, programming.²¹ The NRPA further notes that participant feedback surveys not only can

¹⁹ National Recreation and Park Association, “Determining Your Capacity for Evaluation,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/8e69f469a48747d583225c638f3b0e47/determining-your-capacity-for-evaluation.pdf>.

²⁰ Although the U.S. GAO’s guidance is in reference to federal programs, there is overlap in this guidance and that of the NRPA, as discussed later in this finding. U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Design Evaluations 2012 Revision,” January 2012, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-12-208g.pdf>.

²¹ National Recreation and Park Association, “Recommended Measures to Evaluate Park Use and Quality,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/87a651f66deb46c89eabb36c5dec0a43/measures-evaluate-park-use-quality.pdf>.

In a May 2016 report, the NRPA stated that the 89% statistic was derived from a survey where 58 urban park and recreation agency directors participated in the survey, a 35% response rate.

provide engagement and satisfaction to patrons and community members, but can also lead to more effective and engaged park and recreation staff by providing an opportunity for staff members to see positive feedback on their work and celebrate their success.

Several suburban park districts utilize surveys, which vary in both format and distribution methodologies, as discussed in Section C, below, to inform their respective programming, including:

- Park District of Oak Park;
- Naperville Park District;
- Rolling Meadows Park District;
- Schaumburg Park District;
- Deerfield Park District;
- Community Park District of LaGrange.

Best practices provide further, specific guidance for developing surveys to obtain feedback while considering resource constraints. The U.S. GAO outlines a five-step process for designing and ultimately conducting evaluations, including surveys:

1. Clarify understanding of the program's goals and strategy;
2. Develop relevant and useful evaluation questions;
3. Select an appropriate evaluation approach or design for each evaluation question;
4. Identify data sources and collection procedures to obtain relevant, credible information;
5. Develop plans to analyze the data in ways that allow valid conclusions to be drawn from the evaluation questions.²²

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education outlined comparable steps for developing a survey:

1. Determine the goal or goals of the survey;
2. Define the information needed to address each goal;
3. Write the questions;
4. Review and revise the survey for alignment with goals and adherence to research-based guidelines for writing questions;
5. Organize and format the survey.²³

National Recreation and Park Association, "Using Data at Park and Recreation Agencies," 2016, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/data-analysis-park-and-recreation.pdf>.

²² U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Design Evaluations 2012 Revision," January 2012, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-12-208g.pdf>.

²³ U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, "An Educator's Guide to Questionnaire Development," January 2016, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/central/pdf/CE5.3.2-An-Educators-Guide-to-Questionnaire-Development.pdf>.

Similarly, the NRPA recommends a complementary set of steps, discussed in more detail below, to collect “high-quality, relevant, time-sensitive feedback” when developing and conducting effective customer satisfaction surveys regarding parks and programming:

1. Set the survey goals;
2. Create the survey;
3. Conduct the survey;
4. Use the data.²⁴

As the NRPA is the organization most directly relevant to the District, the OIG primarily utilizes the NRPA's guidance on survey development and utilization, below, while incorporating additional best practices, as relevant. It is important to note that, according to the NRPA, both the surveys and the steps to appropriately utilize them are effective if there is “a focus on being able to act on the results while keeping your agency's time, money, staffing, and current survey skills in mind” (*see infra* Section B.5, below, for more information on resource considerations).²⁵

1. Setting the Survey Goals

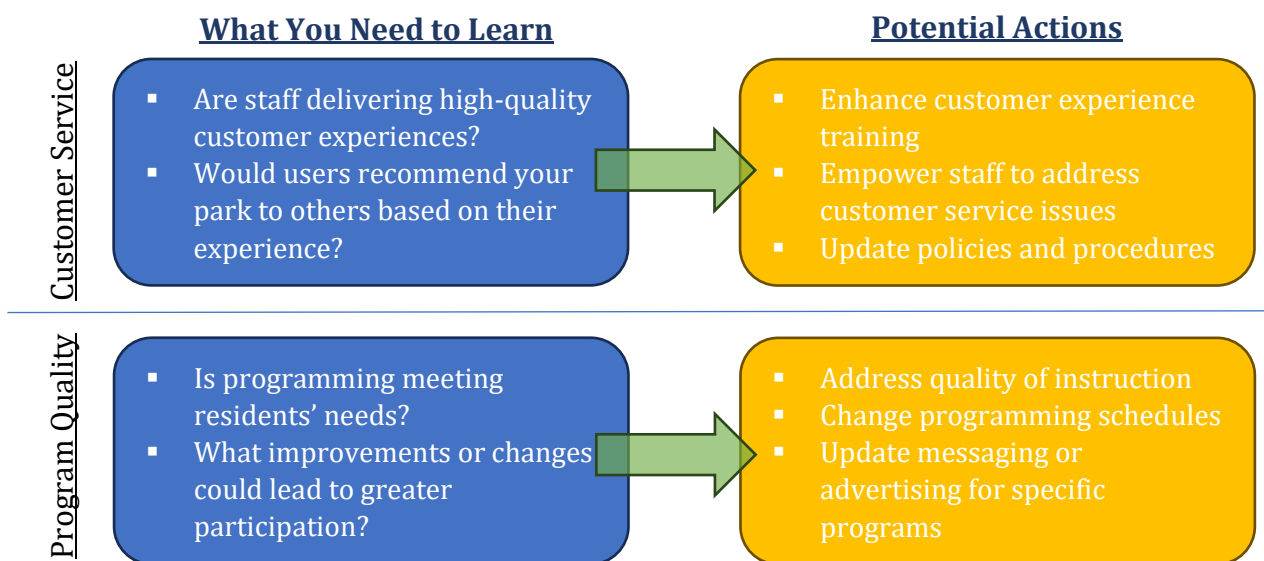
The NRPA notes, “[h]aving clearly defined goals is key to any successful customer feedback survey.”²⁶ This first step thus requires agencies to determine what is to be learned from the survey and identify the actions an agency would take based on the resulting feedback. As the nature of potential goals can greatly vary, the NRPA recommends agencies create three goals or less when creating a survey to ensure manageability. Figure 3, below, outlines examples of survey goals and corresponding potential actions an agency may take based on the survey results.

²⁴ National Recreation and Park Association, “Customer Feedback Surveys,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/>.

²⁵ National Recreation and Park Association, “Customer Feedback Surveys,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/>.

²⁶ National Recreation and Park Association, “Customer Feedback Surveys: Step One,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/step-one-set-survey-goals/>.

FIGURE 3: Examples of Survey Goals and Potential Corresponding Actions



Source: Adapted from the National Recreation and Park Association “Customer Feedback Surveys” resources.²⁷

The U.S. Department of Education, which also states that the first step in survey development is to determine a survey’s goal(s), cites studies which conclude that “[n]ot clearly defining the goal or goals at the outset runs the risk of gathering incomplete, misleading, or nonessential data.”²⁸

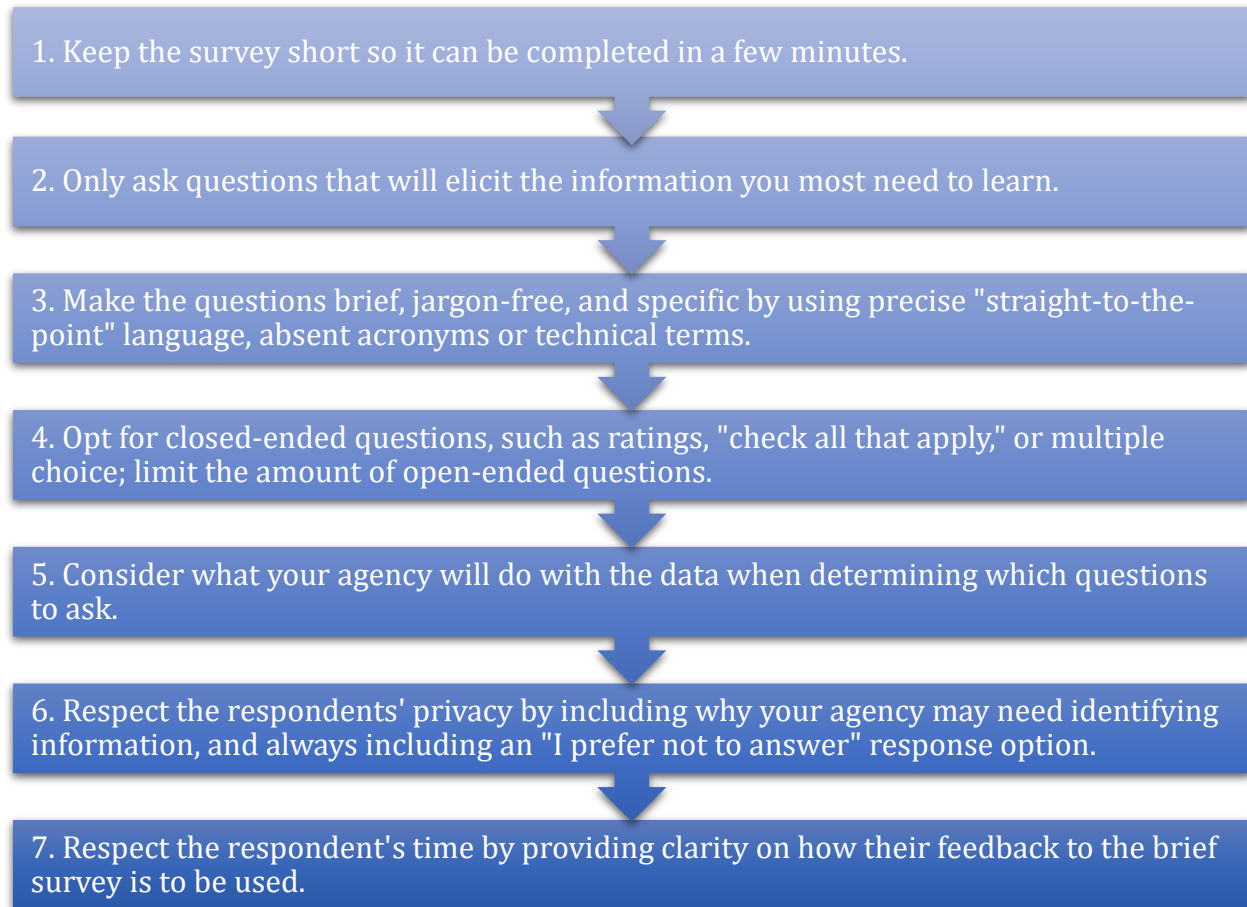
2. Creating the Survey

Once the agency’s goals are established, the next step is to create the survey for distribution to participants. The NRPA offers seven tips for creating effective surveys with clear, specific questions to capture high-quality feedback related to an agency’s survey goals, as outlined in Figure 4, below:

²⁷ National Recreation and Park Association, “Customer Feedback Surveys: Step One,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/step-one-set-survey-goals/>.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, “An educator’s guide to questionnaire development,” January 2016, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/central/pdf/CE5.3.2-An-Educators-Guide-to-Questionnaire-Development.pdf>.

FIGURE 4: The National Recreation and Park Association's Tips for Effective Surveys



Source: Adapted from the National Recreation and Park Association "Customer Feedback Surveys" resources.²⁹

Pew Research Center (Pew) provides further guidance by noting that after identifying which topics will be covered by the survey, the development of the survey should be a "collaborative and iterative process where staff meet to discuss drafts of the [survey] several times over the course of its development" and may include testing new questions in advance of conducting the survey.³⁰ This includes considering and determining the usage of open and closed-ended questions, question wording, and question order. Additionally, Pew recommends limiting the number of answer choices to five at the most for closed-ended questions, provided that all reasonable responses are included. Finally, "identical question

²⁹ National Recreation and Park Association, "Customer Feedback Surveys: Step Two," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/step-two-create-survey/>.

³⁰ Pew Research Center, "Writing Survey Questions," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.pewresearch.org/writing-survey-questions/>.

wording should be used when the intention is to compare results to those from earlier surveys.”³¹

The U.S. Department of Education also provides similar guidance where, in addition to considering question format, e.g., open-ended or closed-ended, survey questions should ensure clarity and minimize bias by using simple language that is free of jargon and avoiding loaded questions, questions that elicit socially desirable responses, leading questions, and double-barreled questions, i.e., questions that ask two questions in one.³² Other considerations from the U.S. Department of Education include:

- Use positively worded questions; use negative language sparingly;
- Include directions for each type of question;
- Clearly define all terms that could be misunderstood;
- Include an “Other” response when the response options may not include all possible responses;
- Provide anchor labels, e.g., “on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 = Strongly agree, etc.” and ensure each rating scale question has 4 to 7 anchor points;
- Ensure response choices are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, when applicable, e.g., if asking for a participant’s age, use “20-29,” “30-39,” etc., instead of “20-30,” “30-40,” etc.;
- Eliminate or revise questions that may be culturally insensitive or offensive.

3. Conducting the Survey

The third step is to conduct the survey by identifying the survey method most appropriate for both the agency and the survey goals. While the NRPA noted that “[t]here is no single optimal survey method,” the Association does outline five common methods with corresponding considerations, as outlined in Figure 5, below:

³¹ Pew Research Center, “Writing Survey Questions,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.pewresearch.org/writing-survey-questions/>.

³² U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, “An Educator’s Guide to Questionnaire Development,” January 2016, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/central/pdf/CE5.3.2-An-Educators-Guide-to-Questionnaire-Development.pdf>.

FIGURE 5: Five Common Survey Methods

Method	Benefits	Limitations	Best Use	Notes
E-mail	Low cost; efficient	Limited to existing contacts; May not be representative of intended audience	When e-mail list reflects target sample	If survey is for a specific class, the registration list likely includes participants’ e-mail addresses
Postcard	Most representative response pool	Significant expense; Low response rate	Good for general feedback rather than a specific event	Include brief context and a link to the electronic version
Public Event	Offers in-person engagement	Cost and time intensive; representative response pool is unlikely	Events with formal registration	If interview-style, should be brief; Can complete paper or digital survey
Website	Lowest cost; Most efficient	Response unlikely to be representative	Soliciting general feedback and comments	Place a survey link on the agency’s website
Door-to-Door	Very representative of intended audience	Cost and time intensive; May feel intrusive to respondents	Good for general feedback rather than a specific event	Canvass the community and knock on doors

Source: Adapted from the National Recreation and Park Association “Customer Feedback Surveys” resources.³³

The NRPA also recommends considering offering an incentive, contingent on budget, to help improve response rates.

4. Using Survey Data

Finally, the NRPA recommends using the data generated from these surveys both within and outside of the agency. Using data within an agency can improve programs as well as build staff skills. Figure 6, below, provides more details about the NRPA’s guidance for using survey data within an agency:

³³ National Recreation and Park Association, “Customer Feedback Surveys: Step Three,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/step-three-conduct-survey/>.

FIGURE 6: Using Data Inside the Surveying Agency

Identify "bright spots" and spread them

- Identify positive areas and trends.
- Determine if positive feedback from one program can be applied to other programming.

Identify opportunities for improvement and address them

- Identify issues that can be easily addressed in the near-term.
- Make action plans that include next steps, staff roles, and deadlines.
- Determine if issues will require changes in policies, as well as new or additional resources.

Build a culture of continuous improvement

- Have an open, detailed, direct, and constructive dialog with team on the key findings.
- Avoid blame and instead focus on the problem.

Source: Adapted from the National Recreation and Park Association "Customer Feedback Surveys" resources.³⁴

The NRPA does state that agencies should "not jump to conclusions over a single data point or comment," noting that "[d]ata at the extremes – positive or negative – should not be discarded but placed into context."³⁵ To do this, agencies should "look at other data sources in conjunction with [the] survey results," if available, so that "survey results will not exist in a vacuum."³⁶

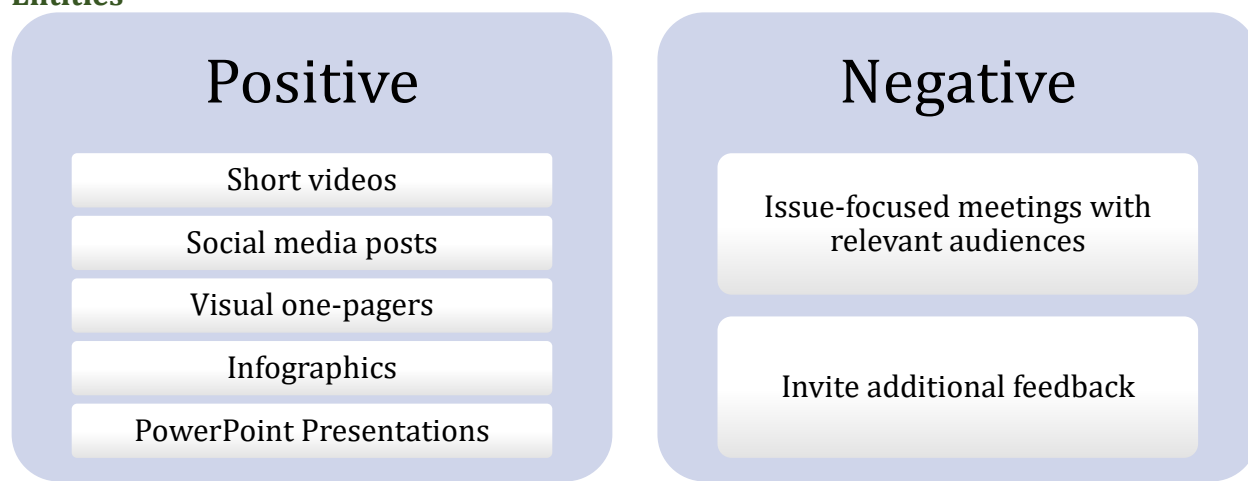
Data can also be used outside an agency to communicate with key stakeholders, including community members. When communicating survey results externally, the NRPA recommends the agency consider who is the main audience, e.g., a PAC, the media, etc., determine what are the audience's priorities, and determine which medium is the best approach, e.g., an infographic, a PowerPoint presentation, etc. Figure 7, below, outlines the NRPA's suggested mediums for conveying positive and negative, i.e., constructive, feedback outside of an agency:

³⁴ National Recreation and Park Association, "Customer Feedback Surveys: Step Four," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/step-four-use-data/>.

³⁵ National Recreation and Park Association, "Customer Feedback Surveys: Step Four," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/step-four-use-data/>.

³⁶ National Recreation and Park Association, "Customer Feedback Surveys: Step Four," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/step-four-use-data/>.

FIGURE 7: Suggested Mediums to Convey Positive and Negative Feedback to External Entities



Source: Adapted from the National Recreation and Park Association "Customer Feedback Surveys" resources.³⁷

The NRPA notes,

What you do with your community's feedback sends a strong message that you respect its views. Acting on that feedback not only engenders trust but also enhances community engagement with your agency, whether through improved participation in programming or greater championing of support from the public.³⁸

5. Resource and Capacity Considerations

As noted above, according to the NRPA, both the surveys and the steps to appropriately utilize them, are effective if there is "a focus on being able to act on the results while keeping your agency's time, money, staffing, and current survey skills in mind."³⁹ In a 2016 study, the NRPA concluded that "[p]ark and recreation agencies lack time, resources, and internal analytical skills to conduct proper analysis and are overwhelmed by the amount of data available to them today."⁴⁰ To that end, the NRPA provides a framework for agencies to assess three categories of resource and capacity factors:

³⁷ National Recreation and Park Association, "Customer Feedback Surveys: Step Four," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/step-four-use-data/>.

³⁸ National Recreation and Park Association, "Customer Feedback Surveys: Step Four," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/step-four-use-data/>.

³⁹ National Recreation and Park Association, "Customer Feedback Surveys," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/evaluation-resource-hub/customer-feedback-surveys/>.

⁴⁰ The NRPA also states that, generally, park and recreation agencies "operate under tight fiscal constraints that force them to make difficult decisions on how to optimally serve their constituents with finite resources." National Recreation and Park Association, "Using Data at Park and Recreation Agencies," May 2016, accessed

- *Staff Capacity and Expertise*

Areas of expertise include “general evaluation knowledge [and] skills, familiarity with the park or program being evaluated, and awareness of the community impacted.”⁴¹ This can help inform whether the agency has sufficient internal expertise, or if the agency will require external expertise. Internally, staff should have expertise in survey development and implementation, data analysis, synthesis of findings, and the ability to communicate these findings to specific audiences. The NRPA notes that “[t]aking a clear inventory of your agency’s existing areas of expertise will identify areas where you will need additional support from an external partner.”⁴² The NRPA additionally notes that having external evaluators with park and recreation experience is ideal, but not required, and that local colleges and universities may be good resources that may provide their services at a free or reduced price.

- *Time and Budget*

Data collection, analysis, and dissemination requires personnel and material costs; however, the NRPA notes that spreadsheet tools, such as Microsoft Excel, will suffice to analyze basic quantitative and qualitative data.⁴³ The NRPA suggests an agency consider the timing of a program, i.e., when does a program begin and end, to help prioritize evaluations with other obligations e.g., major events, capital projects, etc. The Association also suggests an agency consider if the program or organizational budgets have dedicated funds for evaluations. The absence of dedicated funds does not necessarily indicate an agency cannot conduct evaluations, as existing staff members with appropriate expertise may have capacity.

- *Stakeholder Buy-In*

The NRPA recommends that community partners “not only participate in identifying the evaluation objectives and contribute to the evaluation questions, but they also should be key consumers of the evaluation results and involved in their

March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/data-analysis-park-and-recreation.pdf>.

⁴¹ National Recreation and Park Association, “Determining Your Capacity for Evaluation,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/8e69f469a48747d583225c638f3b0e47/determining-your-capacity-for-evaluation.pdf>.

⁴² National Recreation and Park Association, “Determining Your Capacity for Evaluation,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/8e69f469a48747d583225c638f3b0e47/determining-your-capacity-for-evaluation.pdf>.

⁴³ National Recreation and Park Association, “Determining Your Capacity for Evaluation,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/8e69f469a48747d583225c638f3b0e47/determining-your-capacity-for-evaluation.pdf>.

interpretation.”⁴⁴ Key evaluation partners can include community members and leaders, elected or appointed officials, park programming staff and leadership, subject matter experts, and internal and external evaluators or consultants. As such, evaluation questions should represent the values and perspectives of the agency's stakeholders.

By assessing factors in these categories, agencies can determine the resources needed to ensure their respective agencies are both making an impact and meeting their community's needs.

C. Several suburban park districts offer participants the opportunity to complete program surveys.

Several suburban park districts conduct surveys to gather participant feedback for their respective programs, which can provide insight into how the District can conduct surveys:

- *Park District of Oak Park*

The Park District of Oak Park (PDOP) sends a survey every other month to program participants who participated in programs in the preceding two months. This survey, containing five to six questions, is disseminated electronically as well as listed on PDOP's website. PDOP sends the survey to a random sampling of 30% of participants who are filtered to exclude those who completed the last survey; however, if the initial response rate is low, the PDOP will then increase the distribution to 50% of participants to get more accurate data. After utilizing the Alchemer Survey Software to analyze the survey results, PDOP then sends the feedback relevant to a specific park or program. Additionally, in its "Community Engagement Resource Guide," NRPA highlighted the PDOP's hiring of a community outreach coordinator responsible for collaborative opportunities with the community regarding programming (and facility) improvement.⁴⁵

- *Naperville Park District*

The Naperville Park District (NPD) altered its approach to program evaluation to gather more targeted feedback at the end of a season instead of asking for participant feedback after every program, which NPD found to be an ineffective approach. This targeted approach allows NPD to identify a sample of programs from which to solicit participation feedback, e.g., only soccer programming, and then compare the results

⁴⁴ National Recreation and Park Association, "Determining Your Capacity for Evaluation," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/8e69f469a48747d583225c638f3b0e47/determining-your-capacity-for-evaluation.pdf>.

⁴⁵ National Recreation and Park Association, "Community Engagement Resource Guide: Creating Equitable Access to High-Performing Parks," accessed March 12, 2026. <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/19b3cbe05a634d5e8d3b712dbc8aa9d0/community-engagement-guide-nrpa.pdf>

year-over-year.⁴⁶ NPD did note they do not conduct their targeted feedback every year.

- *Rolling Meadows Park District*

The Rolling Meadows Park District (RMPD) utilizes surveys as a source of data to inform its programming. RMPD procured the Civic Plus application which sends an automated e-mail with a program evaluation survey to program participants once the program concludes. According to RMPD, the survey has less questions to promote higher response rates, noting that even if response rates were low, they would still prefer having the data rather than nothing at all. Once RMPD's Marketing Department reviews the survey responses, the Department will give the results to supervisors of the respective programs.

- *Schaumburg Park District*

The Schaumburg Park District (SPD) disseminates online surveys once a program session ends.⁴⁷ These surveys, created with the application Jotform, are sent out automatically using the class lists from ActiveNet, the same application the Chicago Park District uses for its programming registration. SPD also includes a link to the survey in e-mails which are sent out every other week.

Additionally, the Deerfield Park District and the Community Park District of LaGrange offer program evaluation surveys on their respective websites; the OIG was unable to make contact with either entity to learn more about these surveys and related processes.⁴⁸

D. The introduction of formal participant feedback would be consistent with the District's Strategic Plan.

The District's Strategic Plan (Plan) for the years 2025 through 2030 outlines the District's goals and strategies for providing "all Chicagoans with a clear understanding of how the Park District will continue to strengthen and improve its services and amenities for all

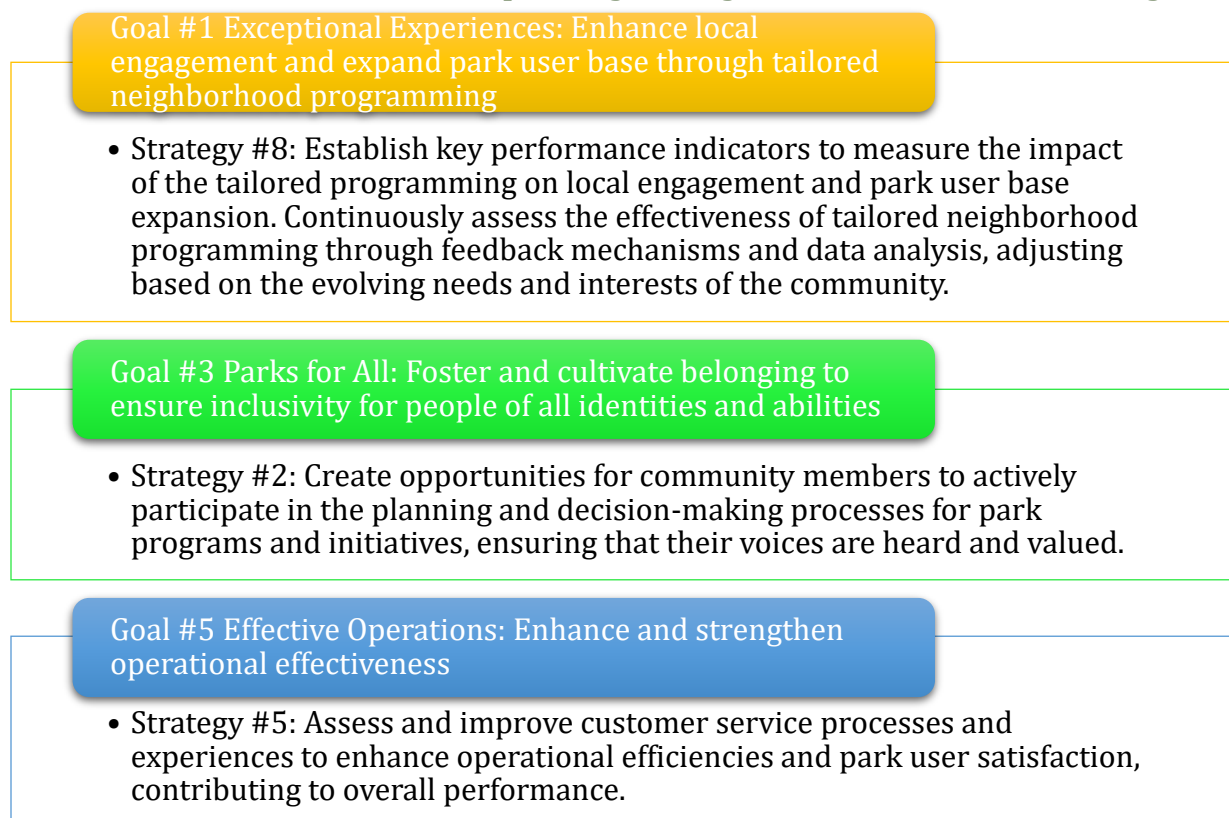
⁴⁶ The OIG also spoke with Seattle Park and Recreation who had previously surveyed participants also using a similar alternative approach. Seattle created program categories and disseminated a survey for each category, i.e., rather than creating a survey for Ballet Level 2, specifically, Seattle disseminated a "dance" survey. Further, Seattle would only pick three or four categories to survey a quarter. Participants received the surveys via QR codes. Seattle also noted the importance of sending survey results back to the staff to get "ground level buy-in." COVID-19 impacted Seattle's program surveying, as the city reallocated resources to other governmental needs.

⁴⁷ SPD also partners with an external consultant to conduct a survey every five years to help inform what new programs the District can offer.

⁴⁸ Deerfield Park District, "Program Survey (Website," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=W10CfeLK0EqK5uj6yYMTuhAnchdWoxJKkoZaMvKdLzlUQTNYV0dCUDk2RIISU1JTE5DMU5QRENERS4u>; Community Park District of LaGrange, "Community Park District Program Evaluation," 2018, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.communityparkdistrict.org/programs/program-evaluation>.

Chicagoans.”⁴⁹ Among the community feedback pertaining to the Plan’s goals, the Plan highlights that “[m]any residents stressed the need to improve communication between the Park District and community members to both improve community awareness of existing offerings and gather input on a regular basis.”⁵⁰ Figure 8, below, highlights three goals and corresponding strategies related to participant feedback:

FIGURE 8: Select Goals and Corresponding Strategies from the District’s Strategic Plan



Source: The Chicago Park District’s *2025-2030 Strategic Plan*.⁵¹

Recommendations

1. The Chicago Park District should provide program participants an opportunity to provide formal feedback on the District’s programming through end-of-program surveys that comport with best practices.

⁴⁹ Chicago Park District, “2025-2030 Strategic Plan,” accessed January 7, 2026, <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/strategic-plan>.

⁵⁰ Chicago Park District, “2025-2030 Strategic Plan,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/strategic-plan>.

⁵¹ Chicago Park District, “2025-2030 Strategic Plan,” accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/strategic-plan>.

- a. The Chicago Park District should establish the goals of these surveys, including determining what is to be learned from the surveys and identifying the actions the District would take based on the resulting feedback.
 - b. The Chicago Park District should consider content and structure when creating the survey, e.g., types of questions, order of questions, language, etc., to help ensure higher response rates. The District should further allow for internal review and revisions of the surveys, as appropriate.
 - c. The Chicago Park District should identify the survey population by identifying what programs are being evaluated and how often. For example, the District should consider if a sampling of programs, as other park districts have done, is a more appropriate approach rather than evaluating all programs after every session.
 - d. The Chicago Park District should determine which mechanism for survey distribution, e.g., e-mail, website posting, etc., best meets the District's needs.
 - e. The Chicago Park District should ensure survey results are meaningfully reviewed and analyzed.
 - f. The Chicago Park District should ensure survey results are communicated internally and externally, as needed, including to park supervisors, to help inform programming decisions.
 - g. The Chicago Park District should identify an appropriate timeline for creating, distributing, and analyzing the program surveys. The timeline should ensure staff receives the surveys in a timely manner for distribution, as well as ensure sufficient time to meaningfully review the results of the surveys and enact any changes for future program sessions.
2. The Chicago Park District should evaluate the District's capacity to create, distribute, and analyze program participant surveys and communicate subsequent survey results in order to determine if external partners are required. The District should further formalize policies and procedures regarding program surveys and clearly delineate which entities are responsible for which parts of the process.

Management Response

The Department of Community Recreation agreed with both of the OIG's recommendations.

In response to Recommendation 1, Community Recreation acknowledged the importance of establishing a formal, systemic approach to collecting program participant feedback, while also noting barriers to implementation, including not currently having a dedicated survey tool or staff member who is responsible for analyzing survey results. Community Recreation stated the Department is in the planning stages for implementing a phased approach to setting up end-of-program surveys that are aligned with NRPA best practices and meet national accreditation standards through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). Phase 1 of Community Recreation's implementation is intended to focus on foundational work in FY2026 by establishing survey goals, developing

a standardized survey template, identifying a survey population, piloting the surveys in select programs, determining a feasible survey distribution mechanism, and ensuring information is communicated back to the appropriate Community Recreation staff. Phase 2, intended for FY2027, includes expanding sampling and automation.

In response to Recommendation 2, Community Recreation stated the Department recognizes that a sustainable program evaluation system requires an assessment of internal capacity. Community Recreation further stated they have developed a document that includes a capacity assessment as well as a proposed governance structure for any future end-of-program survey system that outlines the functions of the survey, methods of distribution, analysis, and reporting on the survey findings. Community Recreation aims to use the information throughout FY2026 and FY2027 as the basis for formalizing policies and procedures surrounding end-of-program surveys, as well as to determine if external partnerships or platform investments will be necessary.





















For the Department of Community Recreation's full response, *see infra* Appendix C.

Appendix A: Girls Day of P.L.A.Y. Participant Survey

Girl's Day of Play Feedback

Camper Name: _____ Age: _____

Please mark the face that best describes your feelings toward the following.

	Awesome	Happy	Okay	Unhappy	Upset/Sad
Mark the face that best describes how you feel about the activities at Girl's Day of Play.					
Mark the face that best describes how you feel about making new friends at Girl's Day of Play.					
Mark the face that best describes how you felt about Girl's Day of Play overall.					
Mark the face that best describes how you feel after Girl's Day of Play.					

How can we make Girl's Day of Play even better?

What would you never change about Girl's Day of Play?

Please raise your hand when you're done!

Source: Chicago Park District Department of Community Recreation.

Appendix B: Girls Day of P.L.A.Y. Participant Parent/Guardian Survey

Please complete these questions with the child who attended the Girls Day of P.L.A.Y. on February 25th.

1. Please select the site that you attended on February 25.
 - a. Drop Down of Parks
2. Was this the first Girls Day of P.L.A.Y. that the child has attended?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Why did you choose to send your child to the park's Girls Day of P.L.A.Y.? (choose all that apply)
 - a. It was free.
 - b. I like that it was a program for just for girls.
 - c. It provided a program for my child when school was out.
 - d. The activities offered are interesting to my child.
 - e. Other
4. What is one thing the child learned at the Girls Day of P.L.A.Y.?
5. Has attending Girls Day of P.L.A.Y. motivated your child to play more sports?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. What motivates your child to be active? (choose all that apply)
 - a. Staying healthy
 - b. Having fun
 - c. Learning new skills or activities
 - d. Spending time with or making new friends
 - e. Playing to win
 - f. Getting better at the activities they already do
 - g. Other
7. Would you be interested in sending your child to other Girls P.L.A.Y. programs and events, such as Girls P.L.A.Y. summer camps?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - i. If yes,: Is there a specific sport or activity you would like to see in future events?
8. What do you as a parent/guardian like best about Girls P.L.A.Y.?
9. Is there any other feedback you would like to share?

Source: Chicago Park District Department of Community Recreation.

Appendix C: The Department of Community Recreation's Management Response

Recommendation 1

1. The Chicago Park District should provide program participants an opportunity to provide formal feedback on the District's programming through end-of-program surveys that comport with best practices.
 - a. The Chicago Park District should establish the goals of these surveys, including determining what is to be learned from the surveys and identifying the actions the District would take based on the resulting feedback.
 - b. The Chicago Park District should consider content and structure when creating the survey, e.g., types of questions, order of questions, language, etc., to help ensure higher response rates. The District should further allow for internal review and revisions of the surveys, as appropriate.
 - c. The Chicago Park District should identify the survey population by identifying what programs are being evaluated and how often. For example, the District should consider if a sampling of programs, as other park districts have done, is a more appropriate approach rather than evaluating all programs after every session.
 - d. The Chicago Park District should determine which mechanism for survey distribution, e.g., e-mail, website posting, etc., best meets the District's needs.
 - e. The Chicago Park District should ensure survey results are meaningfully reviewed and analyzed.
 - f. The Chicago Park District should ensure survey results are communicated internally and externally, as needed, including to park supervisors, to help inform programming decisions.
 - g. The Chicago Park District should identify an appropriate timeline for creating, distributing, and analyzing the program surveys. The timeline should ensure staff receives the surveys in a timely manner for distribution, as well as ensure sufficient time to meaningfully review the results of the surveys and enact any changes for future program sessions.

Department Response	Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree, in part <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Notes on Department Response

Community Recreation concurs with this recommendation and acknowledges the importance of establishing a formal, systematic approach to collecting program participant feedback. The Department oversees more than 600 parks, over 230 staffed

fieldhouses, and more than 2,000 year-round staff, offering thousands of programs annually. Given the scale of operations, the Department does not currently have a dedicated survey tool or a program evaluation analyst position to support this body of work. The Department has been in active planning stages, including the development of an implementation scope document that outlines a phased approach to standing up an end-of-program survey system aligned with industry best practices through NRPA and national accreditation standards through CAPRA. The Department is currently in Year 2 of a 5-year strategic plan, with program evaluation identified as a key implementation task of the plan. Implementation is contingent upon securing adequate funding, as the department operates with a limited administrative budget of less than \$200,000 annually. Our department is committed to pursuing this work in a fiscally responsible and operationally sustainable manner.

Department's Proposed Corrective Action (if in agreement with Recommendation)

The Department will implement a phased approach to developing and deploying end-of-program participant surveys. Phase 1 (FY2026) will focus on foundational work that can be completed primarily with existing internal capacity, including: (1) establishing a survey goals framework defining what information will be collected and how results will be used; (2) developing a standardized survey template of 6–10 questions covering overall satisfaction, program quality, instructor effectiveness, facility experience, accessibility and inclusion, value for cost, and intent to participate again, informed by NRPA best practices; (3) identifying a survey population using a hybrid sampling model targeting 10–20% of programs annually, with priority given to high-impact programs such as camps, leagues, and teen programs; (4) piloting surveys in 3–10 programs during the 2026 program year; (5) determining a feasible survey distribution mechanism, with options including QR codes at fieldhouses, email distribution, and registration portal links, pending evaluation of platform options and budget; (6) establishing an internal process for reviewing, analyzing, and communicating survey results to Region Directors, Area Managers, Supervisors, and senior leadership; and (7) developing a survey timeline with pre-season survey finalization, distribution during the final program week, a 10–14 day response window, and a 45-day data analysis cycle. The department will explore low-cost or no-cost platform options, including Microsoft Forms, as a starting point given current budget constraints, while evaluating longer-term platform solutions such as Alchemer as funding becomes available.

Implementation Time Frame

Phase 1 (FY2026): Survey framework, template development, and pilot launch (3–10 programs). Phase 2 (FY2027): Expanded sampling, automation, and systemwide rollout. Full implementation contingent on funding availability.

Responsible Party(ies) for Implementation

Megan Wilson, Acting Chief Program Officer; Rebecca Brandtman, Deputy Director of Program Information; Sandra Olson and Derrick Faulkner,

	Acting Deputy Chief Program Officers; Performance Management team
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Recommendation 2

2. The Chicago Park District should evaluate the District's capacity to create, distribute, and analyze program participant surveys and communicate subsequent survey results in order to determine if external partners are required.

The District should further formalize policies and procedures regarding program surveys and clearly delineate which entities are responsible for which parts of the process.

Department Response	Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree, in part <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Notes on Department Response

Community Recreation concurs with this recommendation. As the District's largest department, overseeing more than 600 parks, over 230 staffed fieldhouses, 2,000+ year-round staff, and thousands of annual programs, the Department recognizes that a sustainable program evaluation system requires a formal assessment of internal capacity and clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The Department does not currently have a dedicated survey analyst position or a licensed survey platform, and its administrative operating budget is less than \$200,000. Given these constraints, any survey system must be designed to minimize operational burden on field staff while producing meaningful, actionable data. Our department has developed an implementation scope document that includes a capacity assessment and a proposed governance structure, outlining which functions such as survey design, distribution, analysis, and reporting would be handled internally versus through external support. Community Recreation will use this scope as the basis for formalizing policies and procedures, clarifying roles, and determining whether external partnerships or platform investments are necessary and fiscally feasible.

Department's Proposed Corrective Action (if in agreement with Recommendation)
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Our department will conduct a formal internal capacity assessment to evaluate its ability to create, distribute, analyze, and communicate program participant surveys. This assessment will consider current staffing resources, technology infrastructure (including existing ActiveNet and Power BI licenses), and budget constraints. Based on the findings, our department will: (1) determine whether external platform vendors (e.g., Alchemer or lower-cost alternatives) are necessary and financially viable; (2) develop a formal Program Evaluation Policy that establishes a survey governance structure, program sampling criteria, distribution procedures, data privacy guidelines, reporting requirements, and clearly delineated roles and responsibilities; and (3) identify and document which functions will be managed in-house versus through external partners. Internally, Community Recreation has existing capacity through the Deputy Director of Program Information and the Performance Management team to lead survey design, sampling strategy, data interpretation, and internal reporting. External support may be required for survey platform licensing, ActiveNet integration, and survey translation

services, subject to funding availability. Our department will document all policies and procedures prior to broader rollout.	
Implementation Time Frame	Capacity assessment and initial policy framework: FY2026 (concurrent with Phase 1 pilot). Formal policy and procedure documentation: FY2026–FY2027, prior to full systemwide rollout.
Responsible Party(ies) for Implementation	Megan Wilson, Acting Chief Program Officer; Rebecca Brandtman, Deputy Director of Program Information; Sandra Olson and Derrick Faulkner, Acting Deputy Chief Program Officers; Performance Management team



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- Investigate allegations of fraud, waste and abuse or misconduct by Chicago Park District employees, Board members, contractors, agents, or volunteers;
- Monitor the Park District's compliance with the Employment Plan's rules governing hiring and other employment actions;
- Conduct audits to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the District, ensure compliance with legal requirements, policies, and best practices, and mitigate risks which could impair the mission of the District.

It is the duty of every employee, Board member, agent, and contractor of the District to report any fraud, mismanagement, waste of funds or resources, abuse of authority, conflicts of interest, ethical violations or other improper act by another involving District business or assets. The Park District Code prohibits retaliation for reporting to, cooperating with, or assisting the Inspector General.

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- In writing: Chicago Park District Office of Inspector General, 740 N. Sedgwick St., Suite 300, Chicago, IL 60654
- In person: 740 N. Sedgwick St., Suite 300, Chicago, IL 60654