

FINAL REPORT



Best Practice Study of Municipal Recreation Departments



Submitted to:

The Afterschool Partnership of Greater New Orleans

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INTRODUCTION

This study of best practice service delivery models for parks and recreation services has been prepared for the Afterschool Partnership of Greater New Orleans. Local historical insights and relevant data in this report was provided by former mayors, business leaders, not-for-profit partners of NORD, NORD Staff, and other community stakeholders. Interest in learning more about best practice models was driven by other similar efforts in the City in this post-Katrina era to reconsider current business models and evaluate if citizen users and the community-at-large would benefit by embracing a new “best practice” model.

Regarding the current model used to deliver recreation services in New Orleans, it has been in place since 1946. During the 62 years that have passed since that time, the fundamental value of serving others has not changed; however, the mechanism (model) used to deliver services has. Based on the interest in understanding both the current delivery model and “best practice models”, this report will:

- describe the history of NORD;
- evaluate current conditions at NORD;
- identify and evaluate the pros and cons of three most common models used to deliver services in the United States; and
- evaluate the benefits to the citizens of New Orleans that would accrue from changing the current NORD Model to a new model.

NORD HISTORY

Created in 1946 under the direction of the Mayor, NORD was created for the same reasons that many similar agencies were created in the United States during that era – which was to keep the young people occupied during the summer months when school was not in session. Many of the recreation leaders in those early years were athletic coaches as they, too, were typically not working in the summer and they shared a common goal of helping young people succeed in life as they promoted the values of teamwork, dedication to the task at hand, having fun, and always striving for excellence.

Besides the strong leadership skills of staff, other factors that contributed to the early success of NORD included:

- The reality that scarce city funds needed to be leveraged with contributions from the private sector.
- Programs were offered that provided outcomes that were important to a diverse population of all age ranges and included many personal and social benefits.
- From those who remember those days, the impression is that recreation facilities were good at that time and served the programs very well.
- From those who remember those days, the impression is that the community was more aware of the effort that was undertaken to provide recreation services and that the services provided were “relevant” to them.

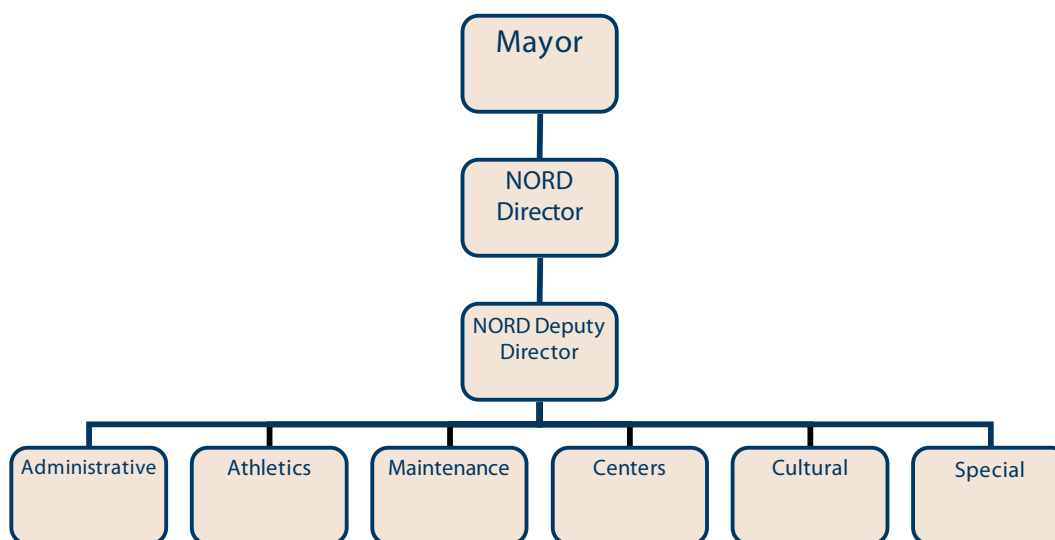
NORD CURRENT CONDITIONS

GOVERNANCE

As created in 1946, NORD is a department under the direction of the Mayor. Leading NORD is a department director who is responsible and accountable for the daily activities of the department. When policies and non-routine decisions are required, the department director coordinates with the Mayor’s Administration, the City Council Recreation Committee, and various Advisory/Planning Committees that are organized by NORD. When necessary, policies and non-routine matters of high importance are sent to the City Council for their consideration.

Figure 1.1 below portrays NORD’s organization. Obviously missing from the chart is any reference to parks and parkways as those duties are managed by the Department of Parks and Parkways, a separate department under the direction of the Mayor.

Figure 1.1: Current NORD Organization Chart



MANDATES

NORD plans, supervises, and conducts a comprehensive and coordinated program of cultural and physical recreation for youth and adult citizens throughout the City of New Orleans, and, as needed, cooperative planning with public and private agencies who share the same mission. NORD manages and operates all recreation facilities mandated under the city’s charter and performs such duties as required by the charter or assigned in writing by the Mayor. Finally, the Department may arrange for the use of recreation facilities and areas in all parks.

FACILITIES AND STAFF

Obviously, in a post-Katrina era, conditions in New Orleans are not yet normal. For example, as shown below in **Table 1.1**, recreation opportunities are significantly different now.

Table 1.1: Pre and Post-Katrina Data

Item	Pre-Katrina	Post-Katrina	Difference
Active Playgrounds, Play Spots, and Open Spaces	70	19	(51)
Passive Playgrounds, Play Spots, and Open Spaces	80	30	(50)
Multi-Purpose Recreation Centers	10	4	(6)
Performing Arts Center	1	1	0
Baseball Stadiums	4	3	(1)
Football Stadium	1	1	0
Tennis Facility	1	0	(1)
Golden Age Facility	1	0	(1)
Outdoor Swimming Facilities	16	8	(8)
Indoor Swimming Facilities	3	0	(3)
TOTAL FACILITIES	187	66	(121)
Full-Time Staff	100	36	(64)
Part-Time Staff	150	19	(131)
TOTAL STAFF	250	55	(195)

Source: NORD Staff

CONTINUITY OF LEADERSHIP

Under the direction of numerous Mayors since 1946, records since 1978 show that the average length of service for NORD Directors is short. **As shown below in Table 1.2, there have been twelve (12) NORD Directors in the 30 year period between 1978 to 2008, thus a 2.5 average length of stay.**

Table 1.2: NORD Directors Length of Term (1978-2008)

NORD Director	Years of Service	Length of Term
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Unknown – four different directors	1978 to 1986	Two year term for each director
Delores Aaron	1986 to 1994	Eight years
Angele Wilson	1994 to 1998	Four years
Victor Richards	1998 to 2000	Two years
Ann MacDonald	2000 to 2001	One year
Charlene Braud	2001 to 2003	Three years
Donald Royal	2003 to 2004	Sixteen months
Charlene Braud	2004 to 2005	One year
Larry Barabino, Jr.	2006 to present	

BUDGET

The NORD Budget shown below in **Table 1.3** is the amount invested by the City of New Orleans to operate the department from 1999 to 2008. It does not include capital improvement funds from the City or capital investments by the private sector.

Table 1.3: NORD Operating Budget from 1999 to 2008 (not including capital improvements)

Year	Amount
1999	8,601,476
2000	9,220,201
2001	8,762,763
2002	9,113,423
2003	7,771,994
2004	7,582,161
2005	8,261,175
2006	823,397
2007	3,480,830
2008	5,164,648

PARTNERS

NORD leverages its staff and facility capabilities with other organizations who share the same mission so that a variety of recreation experiences can be offered. Examples of other organizations with whom NORD partners include Young Audiences and the NORD/NOBA Center for Dance. Especially during this post-Katrina recovery era, these partners are anxious for a better time when funding and other resources are made available on a more consistent basis and at a level which is commensurate with the value of services provided.

KEY ISSUES

Negatively affecting the preferred level of service delivery by NORD are several key issues which were identified by key stakeholders in New Orleans. The list of key issues includes the following:

- An aging infrastructure (recreation facilities).
- The turnover of NORD Directors is too frequent, thereby causing a serious continuity problem with the management of NORD, especially the continuity of programming.
- The level of funding for operating and capital needs is inconsistent.
- Key stakeholders are of the opinion that the best days of NORD were many years ago followed by a steady decline in service delivery.
- Maintenance of athletic fields and parks which NORD uses for programming is well below an acceptable level.

GOVERNANCE MODELS

Generally, there are three models used to provide recreation and park services in America today. In random order, they include the following:

- a **combined** Department of Parks and Recreation under the direction of a Mayor or City Manager;
- a **separate** department in city or county government for the provision of recreation services and a **separate** department in city or county government for the provision of park services; and

- a **Special District** that provides both parks and recreation services in one agency that is created by following guidelines included in enabling legislation that is approved at the state level.

MODEL 1 - COMBINED DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

As its name suggests, this type of service provider model organizes and produces recreation programs, cares for recreation facilities, and for all parks, trails, and open spaces within the park system. Examples of pros and cons are listed below in **Table 1.4**.

Table 1.4: Pros and Cons of a Combined Department of Parks and Recreation

Pros	Cons
Management of all related recreation programs, recreation facilities, and parks are under the direction of one person, thus the coordination for all users is simplified	Working within the political arena can be difficult at times
Minimal conflict between park management and recreation programming	Difficult to manage the department like a business, thus politics may interfere with sound business decisions
Accountability for performance is simplified	Very difficult to create new revenue streams that can be used to improve the quality of programs, facilities, and parks
The process for making management and policy decisions that affect users is available for public participation	
Operating funds are generally stable	
Generally, a variety of programs, facilities, and parks are made available	

MODEL 2 - SEPARATION OF PARK MANAGEMENT AND RECREATION SERVICES INTO TWO DEPARTMENTS

This model separates the provision of recreation services and the care of the park system into two departments. This is the model used in New Orleans with NORD providing recreation services and the Department of Parks and Parkways providing management and maintenance for those areas.

Table 1.5: Pros and Cons of Separated Departments of Parks and Recreation

Pros	Cons
In theory, park system managers can focus their resources on the park system while recreation service providers can focus their resources on quality recreation programs	Generally, this model is not as efficient as other models relative to the coordination of recreation programming and the use of parks and facilities
	Immediate needs for assistance to recreation services from parks may not be addressed on a timely basis; for example, mowing schedules by park staff may not coincide with scheduled games, practices, and tournaments
	Accountability to citizens for a quality experience at an activity in the park system is more difficult to evaluate

MODEL 3 – SPECIAL DISTRICT

Numerous states, including Louisiana, have passed enabling legislation which authorizes the establishment of special districts at the local level to provide designated park and recreation services. In Louisiana, and closest to New Orleans, the best example of this model is the Recreation and Park Commission of the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC) which was established in 1946 by Act 246 and amended in 1985 by Act 95.

Such districts are independent and autonomous with their own governing bodies elected by the electorate within the specific district or judicially appointed and with taxing power.

Table 1.6: Pros and Cons of Special District

Pros	Cons
Vision and Mission driven	Political support is more difficult to get because professionals managing the agency may distance themselves from politicians who may not be as involved in the process as they are accustomed to being with city or county departments that are directly under their control
Less political than other governance models	Creates another political subdivision that relies on tax support, thus citizen support for re-authorization
Dedicated funding source	Extreme pressure to meet citizen expectations
Professional staff	
Continuity of staff and services	
Accountability for quality parks, programs, and facilities is more intense	
Appointed board members are carefully selected and supportive of the vision and mission	
Use of best management practices are the norm	
Serious relationship with community stakeholders due to funding approval that is required periodically	
Appreciate customer needs and expectations	
Constantly evaluating competitors or other providers	
Understand the lifetime value of a customer	
Long term sustainability requires a strong commitment to citizen involvement in the decision-making process	
Embrace the value and have the ability to manage change	
Always searching for the best way to do things, including the benchmarking of other “best of class” agencies	

CONCLUSIONS

Observations from the information shared by stakeholders, data provided by NORD Staff, and research within the National Recreation and Park Profession, several conclusions have been drawn which should be used by decision-makers to make informed decisions relative to the future delivery of recreation and park services in New Orleans. Those conclusions are detailed below:

- Key issues affecting NORD (staff turnover, failing infrastructure, inconsistent funding, conflict between the needs of programmers versus reliable maintenance) are more common to cities who have separated departments like New Orleans than they are to the other models.
- As detailed above in Tables 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6, there are fewer “pros” to the Separated Department Model than with the other two models.
- Attributed to the National Recreation and Park Association is a statistic which quantifies the number of separated departments, like New Orleans, as only being 3% of all agencies in the United States.
- Social, personal, economic, and environmental benefits that can be provided to citizens and the community-at-large through the delivery of excellent recreation services and a quality park system are important now and will always be important. The service delivery model which fits best and positions the City to accumulate these benefits should be embraced.
- Of twenty (20) agencies being recognized by the National Recreation and Park Association in the fall of 2008 for excellence in recreation programming and quality of recreation facilities and parks, 100% are either a combined city or county department or a special district.

ASSUMPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ASSUMPTIONS

Four assumptions have been made which have led to the recommendations detailed below. The assumptions which are the “driving force” behind the development of the recommendations are as follows:

Assumption #1 - Regardless of the damage inflicted by Hurricane Katrina, there is significant community dissatisfaction with the services provided in New Orleans for both recreation and parks, thus support for a new method for providing services.

Assumption #2 – There is hope that decision-makers will be supportive of embracing a different service delivery model which positions the City to truly serve as a “change agent” as its resources are allocated to significantly increasing the personal, social, economic, and environmental benefits that are badly needed.

Assumption #3 – As leaders, we realize that IF WE ALWAYS DO WHAT WE ALWAYS DID, WE WILL ALWAYS GET WHAT WE ALWAYS GOT. The results of NORD’s service to the community after 62 years have not led to strong public support to continue with the old model.

Assumption #4 – Of the three service delivery models featured in this report, it is clear that the model used by New Orleans is the least capable of meeting the demands of current and future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1 – The City Council Youth and Recreation Committee, in conjunction with the After School Partnership, should appoint a broad based community advisory panel to evaluate the service delivery options and recommendations presented in this report.

Recommendation #2 – The City Council Youth and Recreation Committee, in conjunction with the After School Partnership, should review this report for implementation purposes, including a review of the legal structure to be created to ensure the entity’s success.

Recommendation #3 – The City Council Youth and Recreation Committee, in conjunction with the After School Partnership, should aggressively pursue the Special District Model (Model #3) as the new model to deliver recreation services in New Orleans. As the new Special District Model is adopted, the maintenance of recreation facilities would be provided by the new entity while the maintenance of non-recreation facilities and properties would remain as they are now under the current system.

Recommendation #4 – The City should use the Special District Model adopted by the Parish of East Baton Rouge in 1946 and amended by Act 95 in 1985 as a Case Study for the development of its Special District. Over a long period of time, the benefits of this model will accrue to the City and include the following:

- Elected board members will be accountable for the implementation and long term sustainability of the vision and mission.
- Continuity at the Director’s position will result in the creation of an environment in which people regain trust in the system and become more engaged in its mission.
- Trust in the system would result in long term sustainability and increased willingness by citizens and corporations to support funding mechanisms for programs, facilities, parks, trails, and open spaces/

CASE STUDY OF THE RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSION (BREC) OF THE PARISH OF EAST BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

ENABLING LEGISLATION

BREC was created by Act 246 of 1946 of the State Legislature and amended in 1985 by Act 95. This Act ensures that the Commission/District will have perpetual existence; that it is invested with full power to adopt and promulgate rules and regulations within the scope of this section to apply to its own governmental functions, and to control and regulate the public recreational and park facilities under its jurisdiction.

TAXING AUTHORITY

The Commission may impose and collect property carried on the assessment roles of the Parish with voter approval.

TYPE OF BOARD

The BREC Commission is a policy-making board. In other words, all decisions made by the BREC Commission are final.

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

The Commission shall have the power and authority to name and employ a person who shall be designated as Director of the Commission, who shall not be a member of the Commission, who shall be Ex Officio Secretary of the Commission.

The Commission cannot and shall not act in the actual administration of public recreation and park facilities except through the Director, or through someone acting under this authority, and every lawful act of the Director performed in his capacity as Director, pursuant to the provisions of this section and the rules and regulations of the Commission shall be the act of the Commission.

PARK AND RECREATION STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

A requirement of the BREC Commission is that administrative staff will be professionally qualified.

FINANCES

Ad valorem taxes (property taxes) are the primary source of revenue. Other revenue sources include self-generated revenue, state revenue sharing, interest on investments.

FOUNDATION

The 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit organization will generate additional funds to support programs and facilities.



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