GEORGIA RECREATION &
PARK ASSOCIATION

2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SESSION PROGRAM

NOVEMBER 1–5, 2026 • ATHENS, GEORGIA

KNOW YOUR WHY

Detailed educational session descriptions, learning objectives, speakers, rooms, times and CEUs

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2026

Getting the Most out of Conference

ROOM: Parthenon 1, Parthenon 2 & Olympia 2

TIME: 9:00am-9:30am

DESCRIPTION GRPA's Annual Conference is your number one membership value added benefit. Regardless of this being your 17th year in attendance or your very first year. Here are some tips to take advantage of the many resources you will discover over the next 4 days

Learning Objectives:

- Peer Networking- hear ways to best connect with other like-minded individuals at conference.
- Attend sessions- get out of your comfort zone and attend sessions that you may not be comfortable knowing a lot about. This will be a great way to grow professionally.
- How the Business meeting, Banquet, and Exhibit hall can help make your experience memorable!

SPEAKER(S): Morgan Rodgers (Parthenon 1); Jordon Gonzalez (Parthenon 2); Kim Whatley (Olympia 2)

SESSION #: 102

CEU: 0.05

OFF-SITE: Bike Tour (Double Session)

LOCATION: Conference Center

TIME: 9:30am arrival, 10:00am -12:00pm

Join us for a guided off-site tour through Athens highlighting some of the city's most scenic multi-use trails, including the new Firefly Bridge. Led by Christine Stratton, Trails and Open Space Facility and Program Supervisor with Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services, participants will explore Athens' growing network of trails while learning how they connect neighborhoods and community spaces.

This bike tour highlights connectivity to parks and recreation systems by way of the Firefly Trail, a multi-use trail system. Riders will gain insight into how greenways function beyond recreation, supporting transportation, access, and community development throughout the city.

Tour Overview

- Guided bike tour of Athens trails, including Firefly Bridge
- Bike safety overview, including helmet check
- Discussion on trail connectivity
- How the trail supports commuters and recreational users
- Real-world lessons on trail misuse, maintenance, and programming partnerships

Learning Objectives

- Promote safe cycling practices and trail etiquette while building understanding of how multi-use trails function as connected, programmable park spaces for commuters and recreational users.
- Explore the role of urban greenways in parks and recreation systems, including how they support transportation, access, and everyday community use.
- Identify strategies for addressing park and trail misuse and collaborating with Operations on maintenance and upkeep.
- Gain ideas for trail programming and partnerships with community groups to keep trails active and thriving.
- Note: We will be going from Dudley Park to the end of the existing Firefly Trail and flipping it. (yellow and red dots are not completed yet).

SPEAKER(S): Brittany Hallman

SESSION: 103

CEU: 0.2

CVIOG: Contract Management (double session)

CERTIFICATE CREDIT: ELECTIVE FOR CERTIFICATE 1 OR 2

ROOM: Grand Hall 1

TIME: 10:00am-12:15pm

CVIOG COURSE #: 129

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to the principles, practices, and processes involved in effective contract management. Participants will explore the lifecycle of a contract—from initial planning and drafting to execution, performance monitoring, and closeout. Key topics include contract law fundamentals, risk management, negotiation strategies, compliance, procurement processes, and dispute resolution.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe the full contract management lifecycle, including planning, drafting, execution, performance monitoring, and closeout.
- Explain key principles of contract law, risk management, negotiation, and compliance to effectively manage contracts and resolve disputes.

SPEAKER(S): Suzette Arnold, UGA CVIOG - Public Service Associate

SESSION #: 104

CEU: 0.2

Sustainable Aquatic Operations: How to Do More With Fewer Resources

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 10:00am-11:00am

Aquatic operators today are being asked to maintain high water and air quality standards while managing ongoing staffing shortages, rising chemical and energy costs and increasing expectations around sustainability. Doing “more with less” is no longer optional - it’s the reality of day-to-day aquatic operations. Yet forward-thinking operators are turning to sustainable supplemental sanitation to make "more with less" achievable. This session explores and answers your questions about how supplemental sanitation shows up practically in day-to-day aquatic operations. Attendees will learn how it reduces hands-on maintenance time, stabilizes water quality, and uses fewer chemicals and less energy without compromising swimmer safety or experience.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify how sustainable supplemental sanitation impacts daily maintenance workload, chemical use, energy consumption, and operational efficiency.
- Apply takeaways from case studies featuring experiences of real-life aquatics facilities that implemented supplemental sanitation.
- Build decision-maker support for sustainable sanitation using a practical evaluation framework.

SPEAKER(S): Tom Schaefer

SESSION #: 105

CEU: 0.1

Leading from the Back

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 10:00am-11:00am

In today's Parks and Recreation environment, effective leadership is not about being at the forefront—it's about empowering others to lead, grow, and succeed. "Leading from the back" shifts leadership from control to influence, trust, and strategic support. This session will provide practical strategies to build trust, develop staff, and foster ownership across programs, improving accountability, enhancing service delivery, and supporting the growth of future leaders.

Learning Objectives:

- Demonstrate effective leadership that foster the culture of inclusion, safety, and community engagement
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate clearly and professionally with staff, stakeholders, and the public while leading diverse teams with accountability, motivation, and effective conflict resolution skills.
- Apply ethical decision-making to develop and uphold policies that reflect public service values, including fairness, accountability, and transparency

SPEAKER(S): Sharon Brown

SESSION #: 106

CEU: 0.1

All Ages, All Abilities, All the Time

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 10:00am-11:00am

As inclusion becomes a growing priority in parks and communities, many seek practical strategies for creating spaces that welcome all ages and abilities. This presentation explores how Universal Design principles serve as a framework for building truly inclusive park and recreation environments. Attendees will learn how to identify local ability demographics through case studies used by other park systems that have succeeded in creating an inclusive park system initiative. Additionally, we'll discuss how to use disability data to inform intentional design, and strengthen grant applications through social sustainability. Through real-world case studies, we'll examine each Universal Design principle, highlight common design mistakes, and demonstrate practical solutions. Participants will leave with actionable strategies for creating accessible with a framework outlined by universal design principles, welcoming spaces that support diverse users and foster equitable community engagement.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand current definitions of disability as defined by environmental conditions, and how this
- factors into creating community social equity and sustainability.
- Explain why incorporating inclusion as a strategy in creating a triple bottom line acts as a solution
- to the long term success of parks and recreation environments.
- Illustrate each principle of universal design and how they contribute to a park design that goes
- beyond accessibility and encourages inclusion.

SPEAKER(S): Jill Moore

SESSION #: 107

CEU: 0.1

Event Safety & Security

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 10:00am-11:00am

Overview of Event Safety including topics: Safety planning, Event Safety Plans, Communication & Emergency Response.

Learning Objectives:

- Leave participants with a general understanding of event safety planning and why its important to develop an event safety plan
- Discuss specific examples of weather, crowd & other event incidents and how they were handled
- Lessons learned, takeaways and industry safety trends following incidents.

SPEAKER(S): Stephen Moore

SESSION #: 108

CEU: 0.1

Cultivating Connections

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 10:00am-11:00am

This session focuses on intentional relationship building to develop trust and rapport, which leads to effective collaboration resulting in successful programs and events. We will have an active discussion on who, what, when, where and why meaningful relationships are vital to successful collaboration for impactful programing and events. Gained outcomes will foster collaborating partnerships - leading to smoother planning, stronger engagement, and better outcomes.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain a blueprint for effective listening
- Gain tools for equipping through communication
- Gain strategies for engaging team members and collaboration

SPEAKER(S): Michele Coursey

SESSION #: 109

CEU: 0.1

Creating Impact Through Outdoor Recreation

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 11:15am-12:15pm

Great outdoor programs don’t just happen overnight, they are built on care, intention, and connection. This session will explore how recreation professionals can move beyond logistics to create transformative outdoor experiences that foster belonging, personal growth, and a deeper connection to the outdoors.

Learning Objectives:

- Design outdoor programs that go beyond logistics and focus on meaningful participant experiences.
- Create outdoor experiences that build connection, confidence, and inclusion for diverse groups.
- Shift program planning toward intentional, experience-driven outdoor programming that has lasting impact.

SPEAKER(S): River Cheeks

SESSION #: 110

CEU: 0.1

From Lifeguard to Leader: Building the Net Wave of Aquatic Professionals

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 11:15am-12:15pm

Aquatics is often where leadership journeys begin. Young staff step into responsibility for the first time, learn to make decisions under pressure, and discover what it means to lead. But strong leaders don't develop by accident. They are shaped through intentional mentorship, real responsibility, and guidance that goes beyond certifications and rotations. This session explores how to identify emerging leaders in your aquatic programs and intentionally develop them into confident, capable professionals. From deck-level coaching to structured growth opportunities, participants will leave with practical strategies to build a leadership pipeline that strengthens both their team and their entire organization.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify key traits and behaviors that signal leadership potential in aquatic staff.
- Explore mentorship strategies that develop confidence, decision-making, and accountability in emerging leaders.
- Learn how to create intentional pathways that move staff from entry-level roles into leadership positions.

SPEAKER(S): Vincent McPherson

SESSION #: 111

CEU: 0.1

The CAPRA Collective: Sharing Standards, Shaping Success

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 11:15am-12:15pm

Join fellow Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA)-accredited professionals for an engaging and collaborative roundtable focused on the power of shared standards and collective growth. This session creates space for open dialogue among accredited agencies to exchange real-world experiences, lessons learned, and innovative practices that elevate parks and recreation operations. Participants will explore how CAPRA standards are applied in day-to-day work, discuss strategies for maintaining accreditation, and uncover ways to leverage the accreditation process as a tool for continuous improvement—not just compliance. Whether you are newly accredited or a seasoned CAPRA agency, this conversation-driven session will provide valuable insights, peer connections, and practical takeaways to strengthen your organization and sustain excellence.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify and share effective approaches for implementing and maintaining CAPRA standards within agency operations.
- Analyze the newly released CAPRA standards to understand key updates, identify impacts to agency operations, and develop initial strategies for successful implementation and alignment
- Develop meaningful connections with peer agencies to foster ongoing support, idea-sharing, and problem-solving beyond the session.

SPEAKER(S): Kim Whatley

SESSION #: 112

CEU: 0.1

Woofs & Whiskers: Connecting Community Through Pets

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 11:15am-12:15pm

Join us to explore how the Woofs & Whiskers Pet Fashion Show became a tail-wagging success that brought the community together! This unique event invited participants to design and showcase imaginative pet-and-owner outfits, fostering creativity and fun for all ages. Beyond the runway, the program strengthened community connections through partnerships with local animal services, vendors, and pet organizations, providing opportunities for networking, collaboration, and community support. Attendees will gain practical insights on planning, promoting, and executing inclusive, pet-friendly events that engage the public, support local partners, and create lasting community impact.

Learning Objectives:

- Design Inclusive, Engaging Events: Participants will learn strategies to plan and execute pet-friendly or community-centered events that foster creativity, fun, and public participation.
- Build Community Partnerships: Participants will understand how to collaborate with local organizations, vendors, and animal services to expand reach, share resources, and strengthen community connections.
- Promote Community Engagement and Networking: Participants will be able to implement marketing, programming, and engagement techniques that attract diverse audiences, encourage interaction, and create lasting community impact.

SPEAKER(S): Tonya McCain & Veronica Duarte

SESSION #: 113

CEU: 0.1

A Higher Level of Inclusive Play

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 11:15am-12;15pm

Playgrounds should be places of laughter, friendship, and fun for all. With 1 in 4 Americans experiencing disability and autism affecting 1 in 31 children, communities are moving beyond basic ADA compliance toward truly inclusive play. This session explores how to design accessible, comfortable, and safe playgrounds informed by people with disabilities. We'll examine how different diagnoses—including autism, ADHD, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome—interact with play environments, and identify evidence-based strategies that support sensory needs, choice, autonomy, social connection, and healthy development. Inclusive design goes far beyond ramps—it creates meaningful play experiences that benefit everyone.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the facts about play – for people with and without disabilities – why play is important to all people.
- Discuss the differences between a play environment that simply meets minimum federal accessibility requirements and one that is fully inclusive.
- Articulate the best practice design elements for the exterior play environment, such as fencing, shade, and sensory zoning, as well as play experiences that create cognitive, physical, sensory and social benefits.

SPEAKER(S): Jill Moore

SESSION #: 114

CEU: 0.1

OFF-SITE: Bear Hollow Zoo Tour (double session)

LOCATION: 293 Gran Ellen Dr, Athens, GA 30606

TIME: 1:15pm-3:45pm

Join us for a guided educational tour of Bear Hollow Zoo in Athens. This wildlife sanctuary is home to over 100 non-releasable native Georgia animals that have been orphaned or injured and now receive lifelong care in a safe, natural setting. Participants will explore exhibits while learning about conservation, animal care, and the role of parks and recreation in wildlife education. The tour highlights wildlife conservation, habitat preservation, and environmental stewardship while providing an engaging outdoor learning experience.

Tour Overview

- Guided tour of Bear Hollow Zoo exhibits
- Overview of native wildlife and conservation efforts
- Introduction to animal care and sanctuary operations
- Educational outdoor experience focused on environmental learning

Learning Objectives

- Increase participant knowledge of Georgia's native wildlife and conservation efforts.
- Promote environmental education through exposure to animal care, habitats, and sanctuary operations.
- Encourage appreciation for wildlife-focused outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship.

SESSION #: 115

CEU: 0.2

CVIOG: Financial Basics (double session)

CERTIFICATE CREDIT: CORE FOR CERTIFICATE 1 ONLY

ROOM: Grand Hall 1

TIME: 1:30pm-3:45pm

CVIOG COURSE #: 101

This class will give you an opportunity to take a look at basic principles, practices, and sources of financing for local governments; understanding the budget process (timelines, legal requirements, and so on); definitions and fundamentals of budgeting and accounting principles and the politics of the budgeting process.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the fundamental principles and practices of local government finance, including key sources of revenue and budgeting methods.
- Analyze the local government's budgeting process, including legal requirements, timelines, accounting principles, and the political factors that influence budget decisions.

SPEAKER(S): John Hulsey, UGA CVIOG - Senior Public Service Associate

SESSION #: 116

CEU: 0.2

From First Job to Career: Retaining Talent in Park Maintenance

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 1:30pm-2:30pm

Recruiting students is only half the battle. Keeping them is what builds a strong workforce. This session focuses on how park maintenance divisions can turn entry-level hires and interns from CAES into long-term employees. Participants will explore practical strategies for onboarding, mentorship, skill development, and career progression that increase retention and create clear growth pathways within maintenance operations, helping agencies move beyond constant turnover toward workforce stability.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will recognize common reasons professionals leave entry-level maintenance positions.
- Participants will describe strategies for onboarding and mentoring that improve early-career retention.
- Participants will identify one change that can strengthen career progression within park maintenance teams.

SPEAKER(S): Lauren Pike

SESSION #: 117

CEU: 0.1

Across the Table: A City and Contractor Reflect on 17+ Years of Parks Maintenance Outsourcing

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 1:30pm-2:30pm

Attendees will gain a firsthand look at how one city successfully structured and sustained a long-term parks maintenance outsourcing model — told from both the municipal and contractor perspectives. Topics include the original outsourcing decision, contract structure, performance management, and lessons learned from nearly two decades of partnership. This session is facilitated as a roundtable, encouraging open dialogue and peer exchange among participants.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the key factors that drive a successful long-term outsourcing decision in municipal parks management.
- Identify best practices for structuring contractor accountability, performance standards, and communication in an outsourced parks maintenance model.
- Apply lessons learned from a 17-year city-contractor partnership to evaluate or improve outsourcing strategies within their own agency.

SPEAKER(S): Matthew Pate

SESSION #: 118

CEU: 0.1

Speed Mentoring- Live!

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 1:30pm-2:30pm

A fast-paced session where mentees rotate among experienced professionals (mentors, commissioners, directors). Each round focuses on a different topic—career growth, leadership challenges, work-life balance, and navigating GRPA. Gain an appreciation of the benefits of the Mentee-Mentor relationship and grow your network.

Learning Objectives:

- Understanding the benefits of the Mentor-Mentee Relationship
- Expand your network
- Receive real-time advice from diverse leaders on career growth, leadership challenges, navigating GRPA

SPEAKER(S): Kim Whatley

SESSION #: 119

CEU: 0.1

Invisible Barriers: Breaking Down Misconceptions and Fostering Accessability in Parks and Recreation

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 1:30pm-2:30pm

This session focuses on an often-overlooked dimension of ADA compliance: the reality that disability is not always visible. This session will explore invisible disabilities, including anxiety disorders, depression, autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, chronic pain, epilepsy, Crohn's disease, PTSD, and sensory processing challenges, and gain an understanding of why assumptions about "not looking disabled" create barriers that are as significant as any physical barrier.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be able to identify at least five common types of invisible disabilities and explain why they may go unrecognized in recreation settings.
- Participants will be able to distinguish between visible and invisible disabilities and recognize how
- unconscious bias and common misconceptions can lead to exclusionary staff behaviors and policy gaps in parks and recreation programs and departments.
- Participants will be able to recall key Title II ADA provisions that protect individuals with invisible disabilities, including the legal definitions of disability, the obligation to provide reasonable modifications, and effective communication requirements.

SPEAKER(S): Karla Gray

SESSION #: 120

CEU: 0.1

Atlanta Teen Leaders Academy Presents: "Atlanta Influences Everything: A Summer of Leadership and Legacy"

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 1:30pm-2:30pm

In Atlanta, we believe in our young people and we invest in them with intention. This session shares how the Atlanta Teen Leaders Academy creates safe, structured, and meaningful summer experiences where teens are supported, challenged, and empowered to grow as leaders. Our approach goes beyond traditional programming. It focuses on building confidence, developing life and leadership skills, and providing real opportunities for teens to explore their potential and make a positive impact in their communities. Attendees will learn how intentional program design, consistent engagement, and strong partnerships come together to create spaces where young people feel seen, valued, and inspired to lead. The session will highlight how these efforts contribute not only to individual growth, but also to safer communities and stronger connections between youth and the systems that serve them.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand how the Atlanta Teen Leaders Academy structures impactful summer programming within a municipal parks and recreation system
- Identify key components of successful teen engagement, including leadership development, workforce readiness, and enrichment activities
- Recognize the role of youth programming in supporting community safety, reducing risk factors, and
- increasing positive outcomes

SPEAKER(S): Nick Clark

SESSION #: 121

CEU: 0.1

"Is That Tree about to Fall?" How to Conduct a Tree Risk Assessment

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 2:45pm-3:45pm

Participants will learn some basic steps to take when inspecting a tree for risk.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify three basic steps:
- - dress the part (purpose of proper PPE)
- - document your assessment (standard industry form, personalized letter)
- - provide recommendations and applicable timeframe
- Identify whether there is a target.
- - define target
- - define target zone
- - define occupancy rate
- Identify tree defects affecting the likelihood of failure
- - Crown and Branches (hangers, conks, weak attachments, etc.)
- - Trunk (missing bark, codominant, included bark, etc.)
- - Root and Root Collar (cavity, cracks, insects, decay, etc)

SPEAKER(S): Charlie Monroe; Jessie McClellan (Georgia Arborist Association)

SESSION #: 122

CEU: 0.1

Rebranding Park Maintenance: Turning Hands-On Work into a Career Students Want

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 2:45pm-3:45pm

Many students have the skills for park maintenance, but they don't see it as a career option. This session challenges how park maintenance is currently presented and provides practical ways to reframe the work as skilled, technical, and impactful. Participants will learn how to better communicate the connection between maintenance duties and disciplines like horticulture, environmental science, and natural resource management, using real examples and simple messaging shifts that can be applied immediately in job postings, career fairs, and conversations with students.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will identify disconnects between how park maintenance is described and how students view career opportunities.
- Participants will translate daily maintenance tasks into language that aligns with academic pathways.
- Participants will develop improved messaging that positions maintenance roles as skilled and
- career-oriented.

SPEAKER(S): Lauren Pike

SESSION #: 123

CEU: 0.1

More than Chat GPT: How Can AI Help Rec Departments Deliver Exceptional Experiences?

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 2:45pm-3:45pm

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is everywhere, but how can we actually use it in our parks & rec departments? Come join this exciting session with Rec Technologies to learn practical applications for using AI for recreation that aren't just using ChatGPT or Canva – featuring actual insights from OpenAI and case studies from innovative parks & rec departments across the US. We'll also learn about where recent breakthroughs in AI can help us do more with less and create more inclusive and personalized recreation experiences for our communities.

From understanding AI "agents" to interpreting different AI policies, we'll cover how you can put AI to work within your department, without requiring a degree in software engineering.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand foundational AI concepts in the context of parks & rec, like Large Language Models, data
- security, and the concept of AI agents.
- Evaluate actual use cases of AI in action such as live translation for customer support, natural language based reporting, and personalized marketing and community engagement.
- Create a roadmap for implementing AI within your department's policy environment, whether your city has adopted official AI guidelines or not.

SPEAKER(S): Jenna Hurley

SESSION #: 124

CEU: 0.1

From Participants to Partners: Building Community Through Intentional Engagement

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 2:45pm-3:45pm

This session challenges recreation professionals to move beyond “getting through a season” and focus on building meaningful community. Through practical strategies in communication, appreciation, and staff engagement, participants will learn how to create stronger connections with coaches, volunteers, and participants—leading to improved retention, reduced conflict, and programs people truly value.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify strategies to build meaningful relationships with participants, coaches, and volunteers
- Implement communication techniques that reinforce appreciation and engagement
- Evaluate their current programs to identify gaps in connection and retention

SPEAKER(S): Tim Petrea

SESSION #: 125

CEU: 0.1

Recreation with Trauma-Informed Awareness: Protecting, Supporting, and Empowering Youth

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 2:45pm-3:45pm

This interactive session will explore how parks and recreation professionals can better support young people who may enter their programs having already experienced child sexual abuse or other trauma. Through insights from youth development leader Nikki McClain, survivor advocate and former Division I athlete Collin Lisa, and facilitator Andrew Schoppe, attendees will examine how trusted adults, sports, and recreation programs can help youth feel safe, find their voice, and begin healing. Participants will engage in discussion and reflection designed to strengthen trauma-informed awareness and improve how they recognize and respond to the needs of young people.

Learning Objectives:

- An attendee will gain perspective on how to spot signs of young people who have experienced significant trauma, such as child sexual abuse, and how to be present for the young person to be able to find his/her voice to speak and ask for help.
- An attendee will have the chance to understand what he/she would or wouldn’t see in situations, so everyone will become more trauma-informed.
- An attendee will become more trauma-informed.

SPEAKER(S): Andrew Schoppe, Collin Lisa, Nikki McClain

SESSION #: 126

CEU: 0.1

Game Day Without the Drama: Conflict doesn't Define our Programs-How We Handle it Does

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 4:00pm-5:00pm

This session equips parks and recreation professionals with strategies to reduce conflict through intentional planning and effectively respond when issues arise.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify common sources of conflict
- Implement proactive planning strategies
- Develop real-time response plans
- Improve rules knowledge consistency
- Strengthen inter-agency relationships

SPEAKER(S): Tim Petrea

SESSION #: 127

CEU: 0.1

The Invisible Work: Managing Tasks the Public Never Notices

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 4:00pm-5:00pm

Some of the most important maintenance work goes unnoticed—until it’s not done. This session highlights the behind-the-scenes tasks that quietly shape park quality and how to ensure they never get overlooked.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn how to systematically recognize behind-the-scenes work—such as drainage management, edging, debris control, and sightline maintenance—and prioritize these tasks based on risk, usage, and long-term asset protection.
- Attendees will gain practical methods for building routines, checklists, and field verification processes that ensure critical but often overlooked tasks are completed consistently across crews and locations.
- Participants will learn how to connect behind-the-scenes maintenance efforts to measurable outcomes—such as improved safety, extended asset life, reduced emergency repairs, and enhanced public perception—and communicate that value effectively to leadership and staff.

SPEAKER(S): Alex Moseley

SESSION #: 128

CEU: 0.1

Fitness Over Fifty: Create a Thriving Fitness Program for all Levels of Vitality

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 4:00pm-5:00pm

Fitness Over Fifty covers tips to build a dynamic fitness plan for older adults designed to accommodate all

skill levels. Participants will learn the components of staff led fitness, including certifications, class types, and scheduling. They will master motivational techniques to boost participant retention and long-term engagement.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn the steps to create an active, older adult fitness program that keeps members coming back.
- Participants will gain an understanding of how to accommodate all fitness levels and abilities.
- Participants will enhance their understanding of what makes up a successful fitness program in any location.

SPEAKER(S): Lycia Rettig

SESSION #: 129

CEU: 0.1

The Benefits of Installing Native Plants

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 4:00pm-5:00pm

Participants will learn 2 important benefits of installing native plants which are financial and environmental.

Participants will also be provided with a contact list of local and regional resources that can assist with selecting, installing and managing native plants. Additionally, participants will see photos of native plants in nature preventing erosion, covering bare ground and attracting beneficial insects.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be informed of the financial benefit of installing native plants.
- Participants will be informed of environmental benefits of installing native plants.
- Participants will be provided contact information to local and regional resources to assist with selecting, installing and managing native plants.

SPEAKER(S): Charlie Monroe; Michael Cowan (Georgia Native Plant Society)

SESSION #: 130

CEU: 0.1

Role for Initiative: A Strategic Interactive Team Building Workshop

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 4:00pm-5:00pm

In our field, we are professional problem-solvers. Whether it’s a facility issue, a scheduling conflict, or a

sudden change in county policy, we are constantly "rolling the dice." This interactive “choose your own adventure” hour isn’t just a game; it’s a simulation of high-stakes decision-making using the mechanics of tabletop gaming to take the sting out of "failing" and turn it into a learning moment.

Learning Objectives:

- "Rolling with the Punches" (Adaptability): When the dice don't go your way, how do you pivot? We’ll practice "Yes, and..." communication to keep the project moving.
- Resource Management (The Character Sheet): Every staff member has "stats" (Skills). We'll look at how to lean on a teammate's "High Charisma" or "High Technical Skill" when your own roll is low.
- Conflict De-escalation: Role-playing difficult "NPC" (Non-Player Character) encounters, like a frustrated patron or a last-minute vendor change.

SPEAKER(S): Marie Jernigan

SESSION #: 131

CEU: 0.1

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2026

Programmer's Network Meeting

ROOM: Olympia 2
TIME: 8:00am
SESSION #: 201
CEU: 0.1

WOW Our Members- Build a Strong Community Relations and Sponsorship Program

ROOM: Athena D
TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

Enhance your team's outcomes by building and leveraging community relations with businesses and other local organizations. Develop a reliable sponsorship base to expand your offerings and WOW your members!

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the components of a Community Relations role and learn ways to approach and engage local and regional businesses if your organization does not have one..
- Understand why business want to sponsor events and make it a win-win for you and them.
- Leverage sponsorship to enhance your events and take them from good to GREAT! Sponsorships don't always have to be monetary.

SPEAKER(S): Lycia Rettig
SESSION #: 202
CEU: 0.1

Spill the Tea: Presented by Women's Leadership

ROOM #: Parthenon 2
TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

"Spill the Tea: Women's Leadership" is a dynamic, conversation-driven panel workshop designed to create a safe and empowering space for women to explore leadership growth, self-advocacy, and sustainability in the workplace. Using a "Tea Time" framework, participants will engage in real talk, reflection, and actionable strategies that strengthen leadership capacity while building authentic community connections.

This session blends lived experiences, peer learning, and guided discussion to move participants from inspiration to intentional application—equipping them to lead with confidence, prioritize self-care, and break down barriers that limit growth.

Learning Objectives:

- Strengthen Leadership Practice: Participants will identify practical ways to apply leadership skills within their current roles, regardless of title.
- Enhance Self-Advocacy and Visibility: Participants will develop strategies to confidently communicate their value, achievements, and career goals in the workplace.
- Promote Sustainable Leadership Through Self-Care: Participants will explore actionable approaches to maintain well-being, set boundaries, and prevent burnout while leading effectively.

SPEAKER(S): Tanita Cook-Nelson, Shajra Thrasher
SESSION #: 203
CEU: 0.1

Flipping Succession Planning on it's Head

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

What if succession planning wasn't just something organizations did to prepare for their next leader—but a process you could use to prepare yourself for your next opportunity? This interactive session flips the traditional succession-planning process to help parks and recreation professionals identify their career aspirations, assess the skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to reach their desired positions, create a personal professional development plan, and stay engaged while preparing for the opportunity to advance.

Learning Objectives:

- Differentiate between formal and informal succession planning and identify how the succession-planning process can be applied to individual career development.
- Assess their professional values, passions, skills, abilities, and knowledge against the requirements of positions they aspire to pursue and identify development gaps.
- Create a personal professional development strategy that builds readiness for future advancement, including opportunities to gain experience, expand skills, and remain engaged while awaiting the right opportunity.

SPEAKER(S): Janet Bartnik

SESSION #: 204

CEU: 0.1

Unlocking the Power of Sports Tourism in Parks & Recreation

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

Sports tourism is one of the most underutilized tools in parks and recreation, often met with hesitation due to

concerns about facility strain, staffing and community access. This session replaces uncertainty with a clear, practical approach. Attendees will learn how agencies can leverage existing facilities to drive economic impact, enhance programs and strengthen community value. We'll break down how sports tourism works, who the key partners are, and how to build agreements that protect your assets while maximizing benefits. The session will feature a roundtable of Georgia-based parks and recreation leaders and sports tourism professionals, giving participants the opportunity to hear directly from experts actively doing this work. Participants will leave with a roadmap to confidently explore and implement sports tourism in their own communities.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the Mutual Value
- Identify how sports tourism and parks & recreation agencies create reciprocal benefits including: economic impact, facility improvements, and expanded community opportunities.
- Build a Strong Foundation Through Collaboration
- Learn the key partners involved in sports tourism (e.g., convention & visitors bureaus/sports commissions, local governments, event organizers) and how to align goals, roles, and expectations for long-term success.
- Develop Confident, Strategic Partnerships
- Gain practical tools to evaluate opportunities, protect community access, manage facility usage, and structure agreements that reduce risk while maximizing return.

SPEAKER(S): Leigh Hooten

SESSION #: 205

CEU: 0.1

Adult Athletic Leagues

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

This session will explore the evolution of adult athletics within park and recreation agencies and provide

practical strategies for developing, growing, and sustaining successful adult league programs. Using real-world examples from Cobb County PARKS, participants will learn how to adapt to changing trends, introduce non-traditional leagues, increase participation through innovative approaches such as individual registration and open play, and overcome common operational challenges. Attendees will leave with actionable ideas to enhance their own adult athletics offerings and better meet the needs of their communities.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be able to identify key trends in adult athletics and explain how these trends impact program development and participation within park and recreation agencies.
- Participants will be able to evaluate and apply strategies for growing adult athletic programs, including the implementation of non-traditional leagues, individual registration models, and community-driven programming.
- Participants will be able to recognize common challenges in adult athletics operations and develop practical solutions related to staffing, budgeting, facility use, and program sustainability.

SPEAKER(S): Brody Whitlock, Conor Hoyne

SESSION: 206

CEU: 0.1

GRPA 101

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

This session is for all new GRPA members and first-time conference attendees. An orientation of the origin, purpose, composition and mission of the Georgia Recreation and Park Association will be covered. Created in 1945, GRPA has a rich tradition and remains one of the top professional associations for parks and recreation employees in the nation. First-time conference attendees will also get the scoop on how to maximize their conference experience.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will learn about GRPA and what it has to offer to
- its members.
- Attendees will learn of the different ways to get involved with GRPA.
- Attendees will learn how to maximize their conference experience.

SPEAKER(S): Tim Estes

SESSION #: 207

CEU: 0.1

10:15am-12:00pm Business Meeting

12:00pm-4:00pm Exhibit Hall

Pathway to Gold: Creating an Award-Winning Application

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 4:15pm-5:15pm

Ready to go for the Gold? Discover how to turn your agency's achievements into a powerful award

submission. We'll cover stories learned from applying, how to tell your story effectively, and how to elevate your application from solid to standout.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the key components of a successful Parks Gold Medal Award application
- Apply effective storytelling techniques to clearly communicate their agency's impact, innovation, and community value.
- Implement practical strategies to streamline the application process, including timelines, team roles, and content development.

SPEAKER(S): Shajra Thrasher

SESSION #: 208

CEU: 0.1

Culture Drift

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 4:15pm-5:15pm

Even high-performing organizations can experience "culture drift"—small shifts in behaviors, expectations, and workplace norms that can gradually move a team away from the culture it intentionally created. Using a fun car-racing theme and facilitated small-group discussion, this interactive session helps participants recognize the symptoms of culture drift, explore practices and rituals that keep teams on course, and identify one new ritual they can implement at their home agency to "take the wheel" of their organizational culture.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize common symptoms and causes of culture drift and identify how drift may be showing up within their own teams or organizations.
- Explore practices, rituals, and intentional behaviors that reinforce a high-performing organizational culture and help keep teams "on course."
- Commit to one specific ritual or practice they will implement at their home agency to strengthen and sustain their desired organizational culture.

SPEAKER(S): Janet Bartnik

SESSION #: 209

CEU: 0.1

Main Character Energy: Creating Special Events that Hit

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 4:15pm-5:15pm

This session will cover the fundamentals of effective event planning, with a focus on logistics, timeline

development, and creating practical checklists to ensure smooth execution. Participants will learn strategies

to minimize last-minute challenges, expand marketing efforts beyond their organization, and better understand and engage their target audience. The session will also include an interactive game to reinforce key concepts and encourage participation.

Learning Objectives:

- Effective Planning
- Marketing in a way to increase attendance
- Improving the quality of events

SPEAKER(S): Joycelyn Eason, Brandon McLester, Kierra Cordell, Amiya Law, Dontae Hamilton

SESSION #: 210

CEU: 0.1

Creating Beloved Community Spaces without the Premium Price

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 4:15pm-5:15pm

Loved public spaces do not require massive budgets or perfect plots of land; often, they only need a shift in

perspective. In this interactive presentation, we will explore strategies that help communities transform their public spaces through ingenuity and resourcefulness. This presentation is intended for individuals who work or want to work on planning and developing park facilities for their communities (Directors, Assistant Directors, Coordinators, Facilities and Grounds Directors, or others interested in park development).

Learning Objectives:

- Leftover land as an opportunity – A lot of park land is too small or not useful for other development, so it becomes a "park." We will spend a few minutes discussing how to see the possibilities on this type of property.
- Get the neighbors involved – Successful parks need community buy-in. The community that will be using the park should have a say in what goes into the park. This can start with community input and should continue through concept development.
- Lining up the proposed improvements with the available budget – Now that we know what should be in the park, using material selection and creative solutions to keep the cost down while providing the higher priority items from the planning phase and, if needed, planning for future additions in a cost-effective manner.

SPEAKER(S): David Young

SESSION #: 211

CEU: 0.1

Sustainable Trail Construction and Maintenance

ROOM: Athena D

TIME: 4:15pm-5:15pm

This presentation will go through the modern, yet time-tested methods of constructing and maintaining natural surface trails, to enforce a resilient and comprehensive outdoor recreation portfolio in your parks. Trails are a key part of any parks system, so this session will explain in depth techniques behind route planning, creating sustainable drainage solutions, surface selection and treatment, vegetation management, and streamlining ongoing maintenance to allow for a well-designed trail system for park users to use and enjoy.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn how to map and lay out a trail that is both sustainable and enjoyable.
- Learn how to responsibly grade a trail that is resilient and functional.
- Learn how to streamline ongoing maintenance to provide an enjoyable experience for both the land managers and end users.

SPEAKER(S): John Purcell

SESSION #: 212

CEU: 0.1

Aquatic Facility Assessments- What to Expect

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 4:15pm-5:15pm

Facilities age. Some more graciously than others. In this session we will look at the impact of age on aquatic

facilities and what an assessment of your facility can tell you, and what it cannot. We will review how to request and prepare for an assessment to get the best information. Through case studies, we will review outcomes of assessments that led to repairs, renovations and replacements.

Learning Objectives:

- Differentiate between technical, operational, and programmatic assessments
- Identify at least two items that can be self-assessed in preparation for a technical assessment
- Identify tools available that facility managers can use to enhance & document their facility’s condition

SPEAKER(S): Bill Weaver

SESSION #: 213

CEU: 0.1

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2026

All-Network 5K Run

LOCATION:
TIME: 7:00am
SESSION #: 301
CEU: 0.1

Athletic/Aquatics Network Meeting

ROOM: Olympia 2
TIME: 8:00am
SESSION #: 302
CEU: 0.1

Maintenance/Operations Network Meeting

ROOM: Parthenon 1
TIME: 8:00am
SESSION #: 303
CEU: 0.1

CVIOG: Developing the Leader in You (double session)

CERTIFICATE CREDIT: CORE FOR CERTIFICATE 1 ONLY

ROOM: Grand Hall 1
TIME: 8:00am-10:00am
CVIOG COURSE #: 122

This dynamic and interactive course is designed to help recreation professionals unlock their leadership potential and enhance their ability to inspire and guide others. Developing the Leader in You focuses on foundational leadership principles tailored to the unique environment of parks, recreation, and community services.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify foundational leadership principles tailored to the parks, recreation, and community services environment, enhancing their ability to inspire and guide their teams effectively.
- Develop strategies to inspire and motivate others within their organization, leveraging their unique leadership potential to foster a positive and productive work environment.

SPEAKER(S): Jawahn Ware, UGA CVIOG - Instructor
SESSION #: 304
CEU: 0.2

OFF-SITE UGA Tour (double session)

LOCATION: Meet at Conference Center

TIME: 9:30am-11:00am

Experience a behind-the-scenes tour of Butts-Mehre Heritage Hall at University of Georgia Athletics. Participants will receive an inside look at the state-of-the-art athletic facilities that support student-athlete development and daily operations. The tour will include visits to the indoor football practice field, weight room, meeting rooms, athlete dining facility, trophy room, and additional athletic support spaces throughout the complex. Guests will gain insight into athletic operations, facility management, and the role recreation and wellness play in collegiate athletics.

Tour Overview

- Guided tour of athletic and support facilities
- Overview of athletic operations and facility management
- One-hour educational experience

Program Objectives

- Increase participant understanding of collegiate athletic operations, recreational programming, and student-athlete support services within a major university setting.
- Provide educational exposure to athletic training, wellness, and performance facilities that contribute to recreation, health, and team development.
- Introduce participants to facility management practices, including the coordination, maintenance, scheduling, and daily operations required to support large-scale athletic and recreational facilities.

SESSION #: 305

CEU: 0.2

Resilience Reset: Strengthening Teams Through Connection and Well-Being

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

In today's ever-changing environment, organizations are increasingly navigating events that challenge both

operational stability and personal well-being. From community-wide crises such as violence, natural disasters, and social unrest to the ongoing impacts of stress, burnout, and mental health challenges, staff are being asked to do more while carrying more. This powerful and timely session brings together real-world insights and practical strategies to address trauma through a lens of resilience, connection, and support—recognizing that when staff are supported, the communities they serve are stronger as well.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify how trauma and stress impact individual behavior, communication, and decision-making in the workplace.
- Apply practical strategies to build resilience, support mental health, and foster psychologically safe,
- help-seeking environments.
- Demonstrate effective communication techniques that strengthen team connection and promote a culture of empathy, support, and well-being.

SPEAKER(S): Lori Hoffner

SESSION #: 306

CEU: 0.1

Cemeteries: The Original Park! (double session)

LOCATION: Athena D

TIME: 9:00am

We will take a brief stroll through the history of cemeteries as the first green spaces for leisure and recreation before they gained their "creepy" and "ominous" reputation. Families often sought these rural, garden spaces

out for picnics, nature and peace as the original park space. We will also explore how to use modern cemeteries as green space and how to preserve them. Then we will explore Athens first cemetery, Jackson St. Cemetery (.5 mile walk from the Classic Center).

Learning Objectives:

- We will discover the history of cemeteries and how people used them as park spaces.
- We will identify how cemeteries in modern time can be reimagined as park/green spaces and how you can incorporate them into your current park system.
- We will explore partner organizations for preservation of current and future cemetery spaces.

SPEAKER(S): Cara Prell

SESSION #: 307

CEU: 0.2

Glow Big or Go Home

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 9:00am

Learn how to turn everyday programs into memorable experiences using glow-in-the-dark elements. This

session will highlight successful events, simple strategies, and practical tools you can easily recreate. This is an interactive presentation with hands-on activities and participation. Come ready to jump in and have some fun!

Learning Objectives:

- Identify key elements that make glow-in-the-dark events engaging and successful
- Apply simple, budget-friendly strategies to transform existing programs into glow experience
- Develop and participate in interactive activities that can be implemented in their own programming

SPEAKER(S): Tara Vroman

SESSION #: 308

CEU: 0.1

Reframing Maintenance: Attracting and Developing the Next Generation Workforce

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

Parks maintenance is often misunderstood, yet it offers one of the most meaningful and hands-on career paths in public service. To connect with emerging professionals, agencies must move beyond outdated perceptions and rethink how they position maintenance roles, build career pathways, and create purpose-driven experiences. This session explores practical strategies for recruiting and developing a new generation of professionals who are motivated by impact, growth, and connection to their communities.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will identify practical ways to reposition maintenance roles as skilled, impactful, and career-oriented opportunities.
- Participants will explore recruitment approaches that resonate with digitally connected, purpose-driven individuals.
- Participants will develop strategies to foster long-term engagement, growth, and professional identity within maintenance teams.

SPEAKER(S): Bryan Dixon

SESSION #: 309

CEU: 0.1

Living in the Future: Identifying, Adapting to and Thriving in the Future of Athletic Uniforms and Equipment

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

Take a quick trip down memory lane of how our parents conducted youth sports before both learning about

and discussing current and future processes and outcomes in recreational and travel athletics.

Learning Objectives:

- Where did we come from?
- - Why were things the way they were?
- - Was it really the good old days?
- Where are we now?
- - Is all of this good or bad?
- - Why does it seem we're playing catch up?
- - Why does it seem we're underfunded?
- What helps and what hurts?
- - Do we really need all of this?
- - How do we know the difference between wants and needs?
- - Who pays for all of this?

SPEAKER(S): Colton Green

SESSION #: 310

CEU: 0.1

Dumpster Fires

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

Dumpster container fires may seem like a simple operation yet can have as many if not more hazards as some structure fires. This session will consist of a panel of parks and recreation professionals that have experienced "dumpster fires" at work and best practices in responding.

Learning Objectives:

- Size-Up - Learn to complete a 360 evaluation of the situation.
- Fire Suppression - Review techniques to safely approach, attack and extinguish the problem.
- Overhaul Operations - Attain tools to drown and drain the issue while ensuring no reignition.

SPEAKER(S): Lisa Davol

SESSION #: 311

CEU: 0.1

CVIOG: Problem Solving (double session)

CERTIFICATE CREDIT: ELECTIVE FOR CERTIFICATE 1 OR 2

ROOM: Grand Hall 1

TIME: 10:15am-2:00pm (lunch break in between)

CVIOG COURSE #: 125

Participants will learn to use a variety of thinking styles, methodologies, and creative processes to achieve their organization’s mission through this training. They discuss strategies for enhancing their critical thinking skills and finding creative solutions to problems.

Learning Objectives:

- Apply various thinking styles, methodologies, and creative processes to effectively achieve their organization's mission, fostering innovation and adaptability.
- Develop strategies to improve their critical thinking abilities and find creative solutions to complex problems, ensuring effective decision-making and organizational success.

SPEAKER(S): Jawahn Ware, UGA CVIOG - Instructor

SESSION #: 313

CEU: 0.2

Boomers Through the Z's- Success with a Multi Generation Staff

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 10:15am-11:15am

How we approach responsibilities and tasks at work is shaped by our generational values and experiences.

With Baby Boomers retiring in record numbers, Generation X stepping into leadership, Millennials eager for their turn, and Generation Z already entering the workforce, organizations face an urgent need to bridge generational differences. Without intentional strategies, these transitions risk creating conflict, lowering morale, and disrupting productivity.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the core values, motivators, and workplace expectations that define each generation currently in the workforce.
- Apply strategies to foster respect, collaboration, and understanding across generational lines, minimizing conflict and building trust.
- Implement practical actions that engage and empower employees of all ages, strengthening internal culture and enhancing customer experience.

SPEAKER(S): Lori Hoffner

SESSION: 314

CEU: 0.1

From Friction to Function: Workplace Relations that Work

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 10:15am-11:15am

Healthy workplace relations do not happen by accident. They are shaped by culture, leadership behavior,

communication, accountability, and a willingness to address issues before they become bigger problems. This session helps leaders build a more positive and inclusive workplace culture, strengthen their approach to managing challenging employees, navigate conflict with greater confidence, and use performance management as a tool for clarity, consistency, and equity. Through practical frameworks, reflection, and discussion, participants will leave with strategies they can apply immediately to improve team dynamics, reinforce expectations, and create a work environment where people can succeed.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain how workplace culture is shaped by shared values, leadership behavior, communication practices, and accountability systems.
- Identify practical strategies for managing challenging employees, including expectation setting, coaching, documentation, and supervisor preparedness.
- Apply tools for navigating conflict and difficult conversations in ways that protect team cohesion and reinforce standards.

SPEAKER(S): Chris Nunes

SESSION #: 315

CEU: 0.1

You Know your WHY- Now What?

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 10:15am-11:15am

Parks & Recreation professionals are often deeply connected to the mission behind their work — improving quality of life, creating community connections, increasing access, and providing meaningful services. But passion alone does not always create change. This session focuses on how professionals can turn their personal and professional “why” into effective advocacy, strategic communication, and measurable impact within their organizations and communities. Participants will explore how to champion programs, initiatives, and community needs in a way that is collaborative, data-informed, and results-driven. The session will emphasize that influence is not determined by volume or title, but by credibility, consistency, preparation, and the ability to connect purpose with outcomes.

Learning Objectives:

- Define their personal and professional “why” and connect it to the broader mission of Parks &
- Recreation services.
- Demonstrate strategies for advocating effectively for programs, services, staff, and community
- needs using communication, collaboration, and measurable outcomes.
- Recognize how intentional, solutions-focused leadership and advocacy can create meaningful
- organizational and community impact without relying on positional authority or being the loudest voice in the room.

SPEAKER(S): Lacy Richards

SESSION #: 316

CEU: 0.1

Using Lifecycle Models to Explain the Consequences of Underfunding the Parks and Facilities Capital Budget

ROOM: Athena D

TIME: 10:15am-11:15am

This session will focus on the importance of explaining future service levels as a function of today's capital budget. Elected Officials need and want to understand the full buying decision they are making. This session is designed to give ideas on the types of explanations that help departments attain more capital budget and gain more understanding on what will happen in the future if we don't. This exercise helps show the impacts of SPLOST on the future so that citizens can vote fully informed. There are no perfect solutions, just different outcomes. We will focus on how to talk in terms of outcomes and service levels rather than just project lists and dollars. These are difficult decisions and funding ultimately happens at the elected official level. It is the department's responsibility to provide all the right information for elected officials to make their best values-based decision.

Learning Objectives:

- Establishing service level expectations in relation to asset health
- Providing a "menu" of possible budget scenarios and their different outcomes
- Building a lifecycle modeling "machine" with interchangeable parts

SPEAKER(S): Jonathan Mills

SESSION #: 317

CEU: 0.1

Built to Last: Strengthening Retention in Maintenance Operations

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 10:15am-11:15am

Staffing shortages in park maintenance don't just strain operations—they disrupt consistency, institutional knowledge, and team culture. While recruitment is often the focus, retention is where long-term stability is won or lost. This session examines how agencies can create environments that keep employees engaged, supported, and committed, even when resources are limited. Through practical examples and operational insights, participants will explore how to build systems that sustain both people and performance.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will examine underlying factors that contribute to turnover and challenges in maintaining a stable workforce.
- Participants will assess how staffing gaps influence service levels, team dynamics, and operational continuity.
- Participants will identify adaptable strategies that improve retention through culture, structure, and day-to-day practices.

SPEAKER(S): Bryan Dixon

SESSION #: 318

CEU: 0.1

GRPA Athletics- Expectations to Host a State Tournament/Meet

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 10:15am-11:15am

Discuss the bidding process.

Discuss what is expected / required when hosting GRPA state tournaments / meets.

Discuss communication among teams / officials / etc.

Discuss how to go above and beyond to create a memorable event.

Learning Objectives:

- Is my agency ready to host a GRPA state tournament / meet?
- Learn expectations when hosting GRPA state tournaments / meet.
- Learn how to go above and beyond to put on a memorable event.

SPEAKER(S): Thad Ferguson

SESSION #: 319

CEU: 0.1

The Political Playbook: Navigating Relationships Like a Pro

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 1:00pm-2:00pm

This session will equip both small and larger agency leadership with skills to build successful government relationships through fostering strong relationships with elected officials and others who influence those elected officials. This session will provide tools to navigate through various political terrains, identify strategies to relate your cause to their abilities and reach success to secure funding, enhance advocacy and increase public benefit!

Learning Objectives:

- Identify tools to effectively navigate political landscapes, enhancing agency leaders' ability to advocate for parks and recreation initiatives
- Review strategies for building and maintaining strong relationships with key stakeholders, including elected officials, community leaders, and the public
- Develop skills in public engagement and communication to address diverse audiences and gain community support for projects.

SPEAKER(S): Chris Nunes

SESSION #: 320

CEU: 0.1

Building Psychological Safety: The Key to Trust, Innovation, and Team Success

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 1:00pm-2:00pm

High-performing teams don't just happen—they're built on a foundation of trust, open communication, and shared accountability. At the heart of this is psychological safety: the belief that individuals can speak up, take risks, and be themselves without fear of judgment or retribution.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the four stages of psychological safety and their impact on team effectiveness.
- Explore how individual and group communication skills support trust and collaboration.
- Practice strategies for creating safe, productive, and innovative team conversations.

SPEAKER(S): Lori Hoffner

SESSION #: 321

CEU: 0.1

Leading from the Middle- WHY it's Important

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 1:00pm-2:00pm

Middle leaders play a critical role in the success of Parks & Recreation organizations. Positioned between frontline staff and executive leadership, they are responsible for translating vision into action, maintaining team morale, supporting operational excellence, and driving collaboration across divisions. This session will explore the unique influence middle leaders have on workplace culture, communication, innovation, and service delivery within Parks & Recreation environments. Participants will gain practical strategies for leading effectively from the middle while balancing organizational expectations, staff support, and community impact.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the unique responsibilities and influence of middle leadership roles within Parks & Recreation organizations.
- Recognize how effective middle leadership strengthens communication, staff engagement, operational consistency, and organizational culture.
- Apply practical strategies to lead upward, lead downward, and collaborate across teams to support
- department goals and community service outcomes

SPEAKER(S): Lacy Richards

SESSION #: 322

CEU: 0.1

Project Management Beyond Capital Projects

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 1:00pm-2:00pm

Project management is often associated with large construction projects, but recreation professionals use

project management skills every day. From special events and new program launches to policy implementation and cross-department initiatives, success depends on clear scope, communication, timelines, and accountability. This introductory session introduces foundational project management principles and demonstrates how programmers, managers, and directors can apply simple, practical tools to improve efficiency, reduce confusion, and deliver stronger outcomes across their agencies.

Learning Objectives:

- Differentiate between ongoing operations and project-based work within parks and recreation settings.
- Apply foundational project management concepts—such as scope definition, stakeholder identification, and timeline planning—to non-capital initiatives.
- Implement a simple project planning framework to improve communication, accountability, and results within their department.

SPEAKER(S): Lauren Martin

SESSION #: 323

CEU: 0.1

Seeing Through the Public's Eyes: Training Crews to Think Like Park Visitors

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 1:00pm-2:00pm

Maintenance teams often evaluate parks differently than the public. This session teaches how to align crew perspective with user experience to improve satisfaction, safety, and overall park quality.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn how to bridge the gap between internal operational standards and how park visitors actually perceive cleanliness, safety, and overall quality.
- Attendees will gain practical methods to coach staff on identifying issues that impact the user
- experience—such as sightlines, accessibility, cleanliness, and first impressions—during routine work.
- Participants will learn how small, intentional adjustments in maintenance practices can significantly enhance public satisfaction, reduce complaints, and elevate the overall image of their park system.

SPEAKER(S): Shane Massey

SESSION #: 324

CEU: 0.1

Coaching Culture and How it Relates to Your Lifeguard Team

ROOM: Athena D

TIME: 1:00pm-2:00pm

This session will focus on leadership and culture within a lifeguard team. Tyler will help attendees understand how to establish a framework (by taking lessons from professional coaches) on how aquatic leaders can and should coach their team. This includes setting boundaries and norms with team members so that all employees understand and work towards the standard or goal(s), defining the obligation coaches have to their teams, and how to help team members grow and develop as employees and people.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will be able to establish definable boundaries and norms within the culture of their team
- Attendees will understand why reciprocity is a leadership obligation
- Attendees will understand how to coach lifeguards with a growth mindset

SPEAKER(S): Tyler Daly

SESSION #: 325

CEU: 0.1

CVIOG: Conflict Management (double session)

CERTIFICATE CREDIT: ELECTIVE FOR CERTIFICATE 1 OR 2

ROOM: Grand Hall 1

TIME: 2:15pm-4:30pm

CVIOG COURSE #: 102

This course will explore conflict in the workplace from beginning to end. Participants will learn to identify sources of conflict as well as the personal styles of conflicting parties. Also, strategies and techniques for successfully resolving conflict.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify common sources of workplace conflict and recognize the conflict styles of individuals involved.
- Apply effective strategies and techniques to manage and resolve workplace conflicts constructively.

SPEAKER(S): Jawahn Ware, UGA CVIOG - Instructor

SESSION #: 326

CEU: 0.2

Parks, People, & Pennies: Navigating Economic Challenges with Confidence

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 2:15pm-3:15pm

Economic issues at the national and state level can impact your ability to deliver programs and services.

Whether it is how the state funds schools to inflation to unemployment levels, these factors are important so to understand so the professional can plan and identify ways to manage their effects. Come review several key economic factors and get a better understanding on their impact.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify key national and state-level economic indicators (e.g., inflation, unemployment, consumer
- confidence, public funding) that influence parks and recreation operations and decision-making.
- Analyze how shifts in these economic factors affect program participation, staffing, capital projects, and community expectations within local park systems.
- Develop practical strategies to adjust programs, services, and facility operations to maintain financial sustainability and service quality during both strong and challenging economic conditions.

SPEAKER(S): Chris Nunes

SESSION #: 327

CEU: 0.1

Transcending Out of the Box Thinking

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 2:15pm-3:15pm

This presentation introduces recreation and parks professionals to a “No Box” mindset, encouraging them to

move beyond traditional thinking and embrace innovation, adaptability, and continuous improvement in their departments. It emphasizes the importance of questioning norms, overcoming resistance to change, and fostering a culture driven by strong core values, trust, and leadership.

Learning Objectives:

- Apply innovative thinking: Participants will learn how to challenge traditional practices and use “No Box” thinking to develop creative solutions and adaptive programs.
- Strengthen leadership and team dynamics: Participants will understand how to build trust, apply emotional intelligence, and foster a positive team culture that enhances performance and collaboration.
- Implement forward-thinking strategies: Participants will gain tools to design responsive programs, embrace change, and use small experiments and risk-taking to improve services and community impact.

SPEAKER(S): Aaron Davis

SESSION #: 328

CEU: 0.1

From Basic Needs to Belonging: Why Recreation Programming is Essential

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 2:15pm-3:15pm

Recreation programming is often viewed as a “nice to have” but in reality, it plays a critical role in meeting the essential needs of our communities. This session reimagines recreation through the lens of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, providing a practical framework for designing programs that go beyond participation numbers and create meaningful impact.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify how each level of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs connects to recreation programming, including camps, events, leagues, and enrichment programs.
- Evaluate existing programs through a needs-based lens to uncover gaps, strengthen impact, and better serve diverse community populations.
- Apply a practical framework to design or enhance recreation programs that intentionally support safety, belonging, confidence, and personal growth..

SPEAKER(S): Jordon Gonzalez

SESSION #: 329

CEU: 0.1

The First 30 Minutes: Winning or Losing your Day in Parks and Maintenance

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 2:15pm-3:15pm

This session focuses on the most overlooked part of maintenance operations—the start of the day. Learn how the first 30 minutes (crew huddles, equipment checks, task clarity) directly determine productivity, safety, and morale across the entire shift.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will learn how to build short, focused morning meetings that clearly communicate priorities, assign responsibilities, and reinforce expectations—without dragging down productivity.
- Attendees will identify typical breakdowns in the first 30 minutes, such as unclear direction, missing
- equipment, and poor communication—and apply practical strategies to streamline operations and reduce downtime.
- Participants will gain techniques to establish expectations early, reinforce standards, and create a sense of urgency and focus that carries through the entire workday—improving overall crew efficiency and morale.

SPEAKER(S): Shane Massey

SESSION #: 330

CEU: 0.1

Diving Deeper: A Discussion with Aquatic Professionals

ROOM: Athena D

TIME: 2:15pm-3:15pm

With the summer ending, it's the best time to talk about how it went and start to plan for next year. This

session encourages you to bring your stories of success and frustration to share in an open conversation with other professionals.

Learning Objectives:

- Discuss what went well and what went wrong in summer 2026
- Discover innovative ideas to bring back to your facility
- Discuss the trends of what guests will want for next summer

SPEAKER(S): Tyler Daly

SESSION #: 331

CEU: 0.1

Beyond the Program: Parks & Recreation as a Prevention Partner

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 2:15pm-3:15pm

Parks and recreation professionals are among the most trusted and consistent adults in our communities, yet they remain an underutilized partner in human trafficking prevention. From summer camps to youth sports leagues, recreation staff interact daily with children, teens, and families in ways that schools, law enforcement, and social services cannot replicate. This session explores how parks and recreation departments can intentionally step into that role by equipping staff to recognize warning signs and respond appropriately, while creating space for parents and caregivers to learn alongside them and connect to local resources.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify behavioral and environmental indicators of human trafficking in recreational and community program settings
- Describe appropriate response protocols and reporting obligations when concerns arise
- Use their role as a trusted community touchpoint to engage parents and caregivers in awareness and connect families to local resources

SPEAKER(S): Bobbi Starr, Dr. Brett Murphy Dawson, Bianca Modo

SESSION #: 332

CEU: 0.1

Take Control of Your Online Presence to Boost Community Participation and Engagement

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 3:30pm-4:30pm

Building and managing a strong digital presence is vital for boosting community participation, but it doesn't

have to drain your resources. This session explores free and paid tools from Google, Facebook, and Instagram to help you effectively engage with your audience. Learn the key differences between having a social media presence and an advertising presence, and discover best practices for maximizing your impact online for your parks and recreation department. You'll gain insights into essential "must-do" strategies, as well as pitfalls to avoid when navigating the digital landscape. From understanding the power of targeted ads to knowing which platforms offer the best return on investment, this session equips you with actionable knowledge to create a more efficient and impactful online presence.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand how to utilize free tools from platforms like Google, Facebook, and Instagram to build an
- effective online presence and keep your community informed.
- Learn the effectiveness of targeted ads and differentiate between pay-per-click, pay-per-impression, and pay-per-result advertising to maximize ROI.
- Identify social media platforms that offer minimal value compared to the time and effort spent, ensuring a more strategic use of resources.

SPEAKER(S): Jared Moore

SESSION #: 333

CEU: 0.1

GRPA Baseball & Softball - "Where are We Headed"

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 3:30pm-4:30pm

A discussion on the advances of Baseball & Softball over the last five years within our association, and a moderated discussion on the future.

Learning Objectives:

- Be presented with information on the increased participation and the emphasis put on our associations state tournaments being a marquee event, and the benefits to the host agencies, communities and participating agencies.
- Hear from member agencies who have participated in these tournaments and their experience.
- Have guided discussion on plans for the future of these two activities.

SPEAKER(S): John Layng

SESSION #: 334

CEU: 0.1

Creating an Inspiring Workplace Culture

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 3:30pm-4:30pm

This session focuses on building a strong, intentional workplace culture that drives employee engagement,

retention, and performance. Participants will explore how culture is shaped at every level, examine current workforce challenges, and learn practical strategies to motivate and support staff. Emphasis is placed on leadership, core values, and proven approaches to creating a cohesive, high-performing team environment.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will identify what shapes workplace culture and how it influences employee performance, satisfaction, and organizational success.
- Participants will learn practical strategies to improve engagement, reduce turnover, and better align
- employees with organizational purpose.
- Participants will apply leadership techniques, self assess their own mantra, and core values to help create a motivated, high-performing team environment.

SPEAKER(S): Aaron Davis

SESSION #: 335

CEU: 0.1

Turn that Wreck-It Ralph into a Fix-It Felix

ROOM: Olympia 1

TIME: 3:30pm-4:30pm

This session will teach simple repairs.

Learning Objectives:

- Increase awareness of common maintenance issues
- Empower staff on handling minor fixes
- Preventative Protective Equipment

SPEAKER(S): Shane Mitchell

SESSION #: 336

CEU: 0.1

What No One Tells You About Opening an Aquatic Center

ROOM: Athena A

TIME: 3:30pm-4:30pm

Opening an aquatic center is often celebrated as a major win for a community, but behind the ribbon cutting is a complex process filled with unexpected challenges. From political dynamics and public scrutiny to enthusiastic opposition and shifting expectations, the path to opening day is rarely straightforward. This session takes an honest look at the realities agencies face before the gates ever open. Through real-world experiences and lessons learned, participants will gain insight into navigating stakeholder pressures, managing community perception, and preparing their teams for the challenges that don’t show up in the project plan.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the political and community dynamics that can influence aquatic center projects before opening day.
- Identify common sources of resistance and how to respond effectively while maintaining public trust.
- Explore strategies for preparing staff and leadership to navigate challenges during the pre-opening phase.

SPEAKER(S): Vincent McPherson

SESSION #: 337

CEU: 0.1

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2026

Administration/Leadership Network Meeting

ROOM: Olympia 2
TIME: 8:00am
SESSION #: 401
CEU: 0.1

Nature Next Door: Connecting People to Nature in Local Parks

ROOM: Olympia 1
TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

This session explores how parks and recreation professionals can use the natural areas and wildlife within

their local parks to create meaningful recreation programming that connects people to nature where they live. Participants will learn how to develop and adapt programs ranging from wellness-based experiences like forest therapy to hands-on wildlife education such as snake identification games, wildlife tracking adventures, pollinator programs, and nature clubs. Emphasis will be placed on practical, scalable ideas that work in parks of all sizes and encourage outdoor engagement, learning, and stewardship.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify nature-based recreation programming opportunities within their own parks that support wellness, outdoor engagement, and connection to local natural resources.
- Design inclusive, engaging programs that introduce participants to local wildlife and ecosystems through interactive activities such as wildlife tracking, pollinator education, and species identification.
- Apply practical strategies to connect communities to nature in ways that encourage repeat visitation,
- stewardship, and a deeper appreciation for the parks where they live.

SPEAKER(S): Candace Cook
SESSION #: 402
CEU: 0.1

We Probably Shouldn't Have Tried This...But it Worked!

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

Every agency has that moment... the idea that makes everyone pause and say, “Are we allowed to do that?” This session is about leaning into those moments. We’ll walk through how a slightly unconventional idea that doesn't follow the usual playbook can deliver real impact. Along the way, we’ll share what worked, what flopped, what we’d absolutely do again, and who we absolutely would not allow to do it again (Thomas). All so you can take smarter risks without completely losing sleep!

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will recognize how routine habits can quietly steer ideas toward “safe” instead of effective.
- Participants will analyze lessons we learned through risk, success, failure, and the inevitable admonishing when we screwed up.
- Identify practical ways to test new ideas, adapt quickly, and implement initiatives that feel a little
- unconventional but work.

SPEAKER(S): Michelle Dunn

SESSION #: 403

CEU: 0.1

Scroll-Stopping Strategies: Turning Content into Community

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

Social media isn’t just a marketing tool. It’s one of the most powerful ways to connect with your community in real time. But in a world of endless scrolling, getting noticed (and remembered) takes more than just posting consistently. This session breaks down how Henry County Parks and Recreation transformed its digital presence from modest engagement to reaching hundreds of thousands of people each month. Through practical examples and real-world insights, participants will learn how to create content that captures attention, builds connection, and keeps their audience coming back for more.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify which social media platforms are most effective for outreach, engagement, and community building.
- Learn how to craft compelling “hooks” that stop the scroll and drive interaction.
- Explore how to recognize and leverage emerging trends to expand reach and connect with new audiences.

SPEAKER(S): Paige Ferguson

SESSION #: 404

CEU: 0.1

If You Build It, They Might Come… If You Program It, They Will Stay

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 9:00am-10:00am

We've all built great amenities—but are people actually using them the way we intended? This session challenges the "build it and they will come" mindset and shows how to turn park features into real experiences. From disc golf and trails to kayak launches and pickleball courts, participants will learn simple, practical ways to activate what they already have through intro programs, leagues, and partnerships. You'll walk away with a clear framework and ready-to-use ideas to boost participation, build community, and get the most out of every amenity in your park system.

Learning Objectives:

- Evaluate existing park amenities and identify gaps between availability and actual community use.
- Differentiate between passive amenities and actively programmed experiences, and understand the impact
- of each on participation and retention.
- Develop at least one practical activation strategy (intro program, clinic, or event) for a selected amenity
- within their own system.
- Apply a three-level activation model (Access, Introduction, Engagement) to increase utilization and
- community connection.
- Identify partnership opportunities (local clubs, schools, volunteers, ambassadors) to support sustainable
- programming efforts.
- Design low-cost, high-impact programming ideas that can be implemented within existing staffing and
- budget constraints.
- Recognize the role of programming in enhancing tourism, community engagement, and return on
- investment for park amenities.

SPEAKER(S): Tim Petrea

SESSION #: 405

CEU: 0.1

Well…I Screwed Up

ROOM: Olympia 2

TIME: 10:15am-11:15am

Everyone has that moment. The email you wish you could unsend, the decision that looked great five minutes ago, or the mistake that suddenly feels very public. What happens next matters more than the mistake itself. This session takes an honest look at how we handle missteps, both as individuals and as supervisors. From managing the internal spiral to creating workplaces where people can actually say "I messed up" without fear, we'll explore how accountability, trust, and a little humility can turn bad moments into better teams.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn practical ways to navigate the immediate stress and self-doubt that follow mistakes.
- Develop a healthier approach to accountability that focuses on growth instead of guilt.
- Identify strategies for supervisors to build trust and create environments where honesty is met with support, not panic.

SPEAKER(S): Thomas White

SESSION #: 406

CEU: 0.1

From "That Was Nice" to "We're Going Again Next Year"

ROOM: Parthenon 2

TIME: 10:15am-11:15am

Let's be honest. Some events are…fine. People show up, eat a hot dog, maybe win a prize, and head home. And then there are the events people talk about for months, drag their friends to next year, and somehow still remember the smell of the popcorn. The difference isn't budget. It's intention. This session unpacks how to move beyond simply hosting events and start creating experiences that stick, using practical strategies (and a few hard-learned lessons) to level up what you're already doing.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand what separates a standard event from an experience people actually remember.
- Explore the mindset shift needed to design events with emotion, immersion, and connection in mind.
- Learn how to build and execute an experience-driven approach without completely reinventing the wheel (or your entire budget).

SPEAKER(S): Michelle Dunn

SESSION #: 407

CEU: 0.1

Helping Your Hurting Staff

ROOM: Parthenon 1

TIME: 10:15am-11:15am

Helping Your Hurting Staff is an introductory class designed to equip you with the basic skills to become a competent and compassionate leader. Participants will learn practical leadership competencies that will aid them in communication, team cohesion, and performance, as well as soft skills for work, play, and home.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn to help others by understanding their dominant helping style.
- Learn to help others by incorporating four leadership competencies.
- Learn to help others by practicing six counseling skills.

SPEAKER(S): Ingrid McKinley

SESSION #: 408

CEU: 0.1