

California Park & Recreation Society  
Aging Services and Activities Section

Creating Community In the 21st Century



Strategic Planning For Senior Services 2001:  
Focus on the Future

Developed by:

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***The United Nation's expects that by 2050 there will be nearly 2 billion people in the world 60 years and older – Age Power, Ken Dychtwald, PhD***

**Introduction:**

The community based senior center plays an essential role in meeting the needs of aging individuals. Initially supported by the Older's American Act of 1965, senior centers share a history of providing quality services at an affordable price. The non-profit status of senior centers and local tax support provided by local governments, assure that services and volunteer opportunities are accessible to diverse multi-cultural and ethnic groups, regardless of their economic situation. In 2000, California had over 3.5 million individuals over the age of 65, representing 11.1% of the total population. By the year 2020 it is estimated that the percent of individuals over the age of 65 will increase to 20% of the population. (AARP-2000). In addition to a growing proportion of elderly individuals over the age of 65, older Americans are experiencing increased health and lower rates of disability. A recent study conducted by Duke University indicates that the disability rate for Caucasian individuals 85 and older fell from 69% in 1981, to 57% in 1999. (Los Angeles Times, May 15, 2001)

The sheer proportion, increased life expectancy, and decreased disability rates of aging seniors, means that centers must position themselves to better meet the intellectual, leisure, health and creative needs of older adults.

**Strategic Planning Process:**

To address the demographic trends and prepare for the needs of aging baby boomers, members of the California Park & Recreation Society's Aging Services and Activities Section met at their annual retreat in Bass Lake, CA in November 1999 and 2000, to participate in a strategic planning process. This process includes: reviewing the mission, core values of the umbrella organization; California Park & Recreation Society; identifying external and internal trends, reaffirming the strengths and services provided by Senior Centers, emphasizing the benefits derived by these services, and lastly, providing specific recommendations to prepare for the new millennium. Listed below are the results of that strategic planning process.

## **Mission**

The mission of the California Park & Recreation Society's Aging Services and Activities Section is (see Appendix A).

**To provide a vehicle of support, education, and development to professionals responsible for services and activities to older adults.**

To meet this end the multipurpose Senior Center incorporates the following principles:

- Strengthen community image and sense of pride
- Support economic development
- Strengthen safety and security
- Promote health and wellness
- Foster human development
- Increase cultural unity
- Protect environmental resources
- Facilitate community problem solving
- Provide recreational experiences

## **Core Values and Senior Centers:**

In the State of California, there are over a thousand senior service agencies and of these six hundred are multipurpose Senior Centers that are supported through a variety of funding mechanisms. Over 100 of these Senior Centers are members of the California Park & Recreation Society—Aging Services and Activities Section (CPRS). These centers are largely supported through tax-supported dollars and are most commonly administered through local government's Community Services Department.

Senior Services are delivered under the parks and recreation umbrella whose core values and vision is key to providing senior services within the community. The profession's core values include the following: (California Park & Recreation Society, VIP Plan, Creating Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, p.17)

- Inclusivity
- Accessibility;
- Diversity of experience;
- Service to community;
- Environmental stewardship;
- Personal development;
- Healthy lifestyles;
- Professional growth;
- Lifelong learning; and
- Fun, play and celebration.

### **Senior Center Core Strengths:**

Over the past 30 years, the local Senior Center has become the focus of the delivery of cost-effective services to both seniors in need, and those able to purchase services. The strengths of Senior Centers provide a unique opportunity for marketing and the ability to speak in a united voice. These strengths are as follows:

- The primary focus of the Senior Center is service, strengthening community image and sense of place.
- Senior Center staff are qualified, dedicated, and have extensive community knowledge.
- The Senior Center is the focal point for senior's needs—a “one-stop” shop providing resources, recreational and educational activities, nutritional services, and support.
- Senior Center programs meet the diverse needs of multi-cultural and ethnic groups through accessible, cost-effective and innovative models of delivery.
- The Senior Center provides a base for volunteer opportunities.
- The Senior Center fosters human development.

### **Senior Center Services:**

Core strengths are important for appreciating the depth and breadth of services that Senior Centers provide. Services currently provided by the majority of Senior Centers include the following:

- Caregiver Services
  - Congregate Meals
  - Lifelong learning opportunities
  - Employment Assistance
  - Health and Wellness Programs
  - Health Screenings
  - Home Delivered Meals
  - Housing Assistance
  - Inter-generational Opportunities
  - Legal Assistance
  - Outreach Services
  - Support Groups
  - Transportation Services
  - Travel Opportunities
  - Volunteer Opportunities



### **Benefits of Services Provided:**

The community at large benefits from the vast array of services that Senior Centers provide. These benefits include:

- Assist senior citizens to remain independent and contributing citizens by providing educational and volunteer opportunities.
- Maintain healthy bodies and attitudes resulting in less illness and costly hospitalizations.
- Alleviate the burden of caregiving upon middle-aged adults and thereby delaying or preventing premature and costly placement.
- Foster better decision-making regarding the future of senior citizens by providing timely and accurate information of resources available.
- Provide opportunity for creative expression.
- Provide opportunity for socialization and networking to maintain self-esteem and decrease depression.

### **Trends Impacting Senior Centers:**

Although the history and delivery of current services have a tremendous impact upon the community at large, Senior Center Directors/Managers and Staff must adapt to current and projected trends. To meet the needs of seniors today, and the baby boomers of tomorrow, it is essential to identify those trends that will inevitably impact the future delivery and types of services available. Trends identified by Senior Directors at the Bass Lake Aging Section Conference in 1999-2000, include the following:

- Increased competition of services provided by non-profit and profit making organizations, impacts senior attendance and requires niche marketing and specific targeting techniques.
- The depth and breadth of services provided to the community by the Senior Center, requires positive public community relations and liaisons/partnerships with other organizations in order to promote a positive image of aging.
- Senior Center Directors require adequate and trained staff (See Specific Recommendations #1, page 7) in order to provide quality programs.
- Changes in demographics and language barriers require specialized, and culturally sensitive programming, with easy accessibility to Senior Centers that are specifically designed to meet the needs of different ethnic populations.
- Increased policymaker support and funding are necessary for future viable programming and services.

### **Future Programming Considerations:**

It is vitally important that Senior Centers maintain their current level of quality services and expand their services and program offerings to meet the needs of a growing and diverse aging population. Emerging roles for senior center directors/managers can include: action planning; partnering and coalition building; community building; resource development; leadership development; research and evaluation; environmental stewardship; and multi-disciplinary programming. (Creating Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, California Park & Recreation Society, p.47).

Strategic directions specific to senior centers were generated at the 1999-2000 CPRS-Aging Section Retreats. These directions included the following:

- Develop and organize fee-based programs for Corporate employees including:
  - Coping with aging family members.
  - Retirement portfolio guides for corporations
  - Leisure classes.
- Develop resource directories for Corporate employees dealing aging parents.
- Expand services to evenings and on weekends.
- Expand access to health clinics and services.
- Assist and/or partner with churches and local organizations to establish cost-effective respite care services for seniors.
- Develop intergenerational programs.
- Tailor services to interests of growing “boomer” population with an increased focus on programs based on time, comfort, and access:
  - Fitness Programs.
  - Alternative Wellness Strategies.
  - Affordable Recreational Activities.
  - Programs based on stage-of-life needs:
    - ❑ empty-nests
    - ❑ caregiving
    - ❑ grandparenthood
    - ❑ retirement
    - ❑ second-third careers
    - ❑ widowhood
    - ❑ death and dying



## **Specific Recommendations:**

There can be no doubt that the senior center plays a vital role in the current and future delivery of services. Based on the strengths, trends, and needs of Senior Directors/Managers, the following recommendations were developed at the Bass Lake CPRS-Aging Section Retreat, on November of 2000. These recommendations are based upon current duties, day-to-day management and conflicting priorities that Senior Center Director/Managers currently face:

### **1. Staff who provide services and programs need to be adequate in number and qualified in their experience:**

To deliver quality services and support, the Senior Center Director/Manager needs to be a visionary leader. The successful director is able to manage multi-tasks, is a team player, strategic planner, problem-solver, collaborator and an excellent communicator. Under the direction of the Senior Director/Manager, the "ideal" center of the millennium should include the following qualified staff:

#### **Senior Center Director/Manager**

- Salary range: \$70,000-\$85,000
- Educational Level Preferred:
  - BS/MA preferred
  - Recreation Administration
  - Gerontology
  - Public Administration
  - Human Services
- Experience:
  - 3-5 years supervisory and management experience

#### **Program/Recreation Coordinator**

Program/Recreation Coordinator is responsible for supervising support staff.

- Salary range: \$40,000-\$55,000
- Educational Level Preferred:
  - B.S. in Recreation preferred.
  - Certificate in Gerontology
- Experience:
  - 1-2-year supervisory experience

#### **Social Services Coordinator**

Supervises additional support staff.

- Salary range: \$40,000-\$55,000
- Educational Level Preferred:  
B.S./M.S.W / LCSW  
Human Services  
Social Work  
Gerontology
- Experience:  
Knowledge of community services  
Emphasis on well-being and health  
Community retirement planning  
Education/Counseling experience

### **Nutrition Coordinator**

Supervises volunteers and congregate meals and delivery.

- Salary range: \$35,000-\$45,000
- Educational Level Preferred:  
B.S./B.A.  
Nutrition  
Health  
Human Services  
Gerontology
- Experience:  
Knowledge of nutrition meal planning  
Excellent organizational skills  
Able to work with volunteers

### **Office Manager/Administrator:**

- Salary range: \$35,000-\$45,000
- Educational Level Preferred:  
AA degree preferred.  
Business  
Human Services  
English
- Experience:  
1-2 years managing an office  
Computer skills  
Supervisory experience  
Customer-service oriented

### **Volunteer Coordinator**

- Salary range \$25,000-\$30,000 (p/t)-\$35,000-\$45,000 (f/t)  
Part-time or full-time depending upon facility
- Educational Level Preferred:  
A.A. degree in recreation, human services, gerontology or related field
- Experience  
Customer-relations  
1-2 years as volunteer coordinator

**Facility Maintenance Supervisor:**

- Salary range: \$35,000--\$45,000
- Experience:
  - 3-5 years of experience with HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems
  - Contracting and oversight of maintenance contracts
  - Supervisory experience

**Transportation Coordinator:**

- Salary range \$35,000- \$-45,000
- Educational Level Preferred:
  - A.A. Degree
  - Human Services/ Public Administration
- Experience:
  - Class B license

**Facility/Rental Coordinator:**

- Salary range \$25,000-\$30,000
  - Part--time or full-time depending upon facility
  - Serves as support staff to Recreation/Program Coordinator.
- Experience:
  - Hotel management experience

**2. Senior Centers need to be architecturally designed to accommodate diverse needs:**

Senior Centers built as late as the 1990's have overall, outgrown their space requirements. The center of the future needs to be flexible, inviting, and most importantly, ergonomically designed with the older adult in mind. The potential for sites is endless and only limited by the community's imagination. Senior Centers can partner with community groups to be developed at shopping malls, assisted living communities, or in partnerships with the local community college or adult education services. According to the Senior Center Director/Managers at Bass Lake the Center of the future should contain the following :

**Structural Considerations:**

- Minimum of 20,000 square feet
- Office Space for Ancillary Services:
  - Director
  - Food Services Coordinator
  - Volunteer Coordinator
  - Program Coordinator
  - Social Services Coordinators
  - Transportation Coordinators
  - Maintenance Supervisor
  - Facilities Coordinator
  - Counseling Services

**Essential Requirements:**

- Acoustic treatment that is sensitive to those with hearing impairments
- Individual temperature controls
- Kitchen area—cooking classes, gourmet meals, chefs
- Classrooms—to accommodate 40 students or less
- Easily accessible reception area
- Social room—lounge area, fireplace, T.V.
- Recreation room—pool tables, ping-pong, games tables
- Computer labs
- Natural lighting/sky lights
- Storage space

**Enhancements:**

- Wellness Center—lap pool, exercise equipment, gym, par course, spa, child-care center for intergenerational programs.
  - Indoor Aquatic Facility
  - Gym/Fitness Area
  - Juice Bars
  - Café
- Theater for movies/live performances
- Patio—BBQ
- Golf course
- Walking areas
- Tennis facilities
- Community gardening areas
- Lounges/informal seating areas
- Sky lights
- Fire place
- Fountain/aquarium

### **Ergonomically Designed Furniture:**

- Chairs with arm rests and padding
- Foldable tables with wheels
- Couches that are firm
- Toilets with grab bars on both sides
- Floors that have “give” to lessen the impact of potential falls.
- Doors that open automatically.

### **3. Research and Evaluation to Document Best Practices and Outcomes**

To adequately plan and deliver programs and services, it is necessary that Senior Centers collect data on their programs. Senior Services professionals need to agree which programs merit data collection efforts so that standards or “benchmarks” within the industry can be developed. In cooperation with the California Park & Recreation Society’s Benchmarking Task Force, the Aging Services and Activities Section participated in a best practices project focusing on Low Impact Aerobics Instruction for Adults 55+ years of age. “By studying the instruction process of other organizations, the Low Impact Aerobic Benchmark Team was able to identify approaches and techniques that can be replicated to improve the health and cardiovascular condition of California’s adults 55+ years of age through Low Impact Aerobic Instruction”. (California Park & Recreation Society’s Creating Community with Best Practices, p.1)

- **Maintain Statistics On Services And Programs.**

- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Demographics
- Costs and revenue produced
- Waiting lists
- Number of partnerships with community groups
- Number of sponsorship of special events
- Number of volunteer hours
- Program benefits/outcomes
- Number of referrals made through marketing efforts
- Facility usage
- Volunteer participation
- Program evaluations
- Commendations
- Partnerships
- Perceived community value

- **Processes and Programs for Consideration of Best Practices Benchmarking.**

- Care-Management Services
- Nutrition Services
- Transportation Services
- Information and Referral Services
- Health and Wellness Programs
- Educational Programs.
- Staffing
- Facility Use and Design.

#### 4. **Development of a Stable Political and Financial Base**

It is essential that advocates of older individuals develop a strong political and financial basis for the continuation of essential programs and services. A lack of community awareness regarding the services and benefits of these programs hinder that ability of staff to request officials for additional funding. Strategies to improve the political and financial awareness of policymakers include the following:

- **Increase Political Awareness:**

- Better utilize “commissions” through education and involvement.
- Organize lobbyist groups at local level.
- Cooperate and organize with other centers or agencies.
- Raise awareness of aging issues in the community through local media.
- Invite council and other legislators to senior events such as “Step Out.”
- Use seniors as advocates—train and empower them to be voice of senior center needs.
- Utilize CPRS legislative committee to promote issues.
- Develop liaisons with ARRP for political awareness and political clout.
- Partner with California Departments of Aging and Area Agency on Aging to partner with senior centers.
- Work with professional organizations that have a vested interest in aging.
  - Attorneys
  - Physicians
  - Insurance
  - Home Health providers
  - Public Safety
  - Tourism/Hospitality
  - Hospitals
- Develop professional presentation for community groups.

Capitalize on fact that community leader's are coping with aging parents/family members.

- **Increase Awareness Regarding Budgeting Process:**

Involve key individuals into budgeting process:

Department Director  
Senior Advisory Council  
Staff

Maintain and track trends:

Census data  
Program statistics

Provide quarterly reports of events/outcomes.

Provide personal testimony on how programs have affected lives:

Essay contests.

Participants share at council meetings.

Conduct needs surveys to determine needs of seniors within the community.

### **Meeting the Needs of the New Millennium:**

**The vision of the California Park & Recreation Society is to create community through people, parks, and programs.** To this end, Senior Centers have the opportunity to market to developing trends that will impact our aging population. Meeting the needs of California's elders requires "... providing safe and ready access to a variety of activities that range from fitness and sports programs, to hobby and craft centers, computer clubs and travel clubs. Our aging baby boomers will want to combine "fitness with fun" and will be more interested in environmentally sound recreational activities." (California Park & Recreation Society, p. 47)

Meeting the needs of the growing population through strategic planning will:

- **Assure that Senior Centers are staffed with trained qualified professionals who have necessary management skills including therapeutic and/or gerontology backgrounds.**
- **Allow Senior Centers to develop, market and promote innovative self-supporting programs to industries that are coping with an aging work force.**
- **Provide resources to the increasing number of families who are coping with aging family members.**
- **Provide services for the under-served.**
- **Expand services for ethnically diverse populations.**

- **Expose society to the contributions and needs of older adults. Expand marketing campaign designed to promote positive image of older adults including the contributions and added value communities can utilize.**
- **Develop private and public sector collaborations to enable senior centers to meet the trends of California’s aging population.**

The current economic status of our society is the perfect opportunity to expand and partner with community agencies to expand senior services. The time to capitalize on our strengths and history is now—**before the age wave strikes.**

**Resources:**

California Park & Recreation Society. **Creating Community In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The VIP Strategic Plan.** Sacramento, CA. 916-665-665-2777.

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<http://www.agingstats.gov/>

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Developed by Administration on Aging and AARA).

California Park & Recreation Society: **Creating Community with Best Practices. Low Impact Aerobics Instruction for Adults 55+.** Sacramento, CA 916-665-2777



# Action Planning Framework for Parks and Recreation

