



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

1

Monday, February 2, 2026 | 8:30am – 9:45am

Be a Partnership Superhero!

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Who are the experts in your region, and are you taking full advantage of their expertise? Learn how to leverage your reach in the community by forming partnerships with other local organizations including non-profits, mission-aligned businesses, educational institutions, government agencies, foundations, individual philanthropists, and more. Dozens of willing partners are out there...if you just know who, how, and what to ask!

Shannon Pennington, Warren County Park District; Lauren Asquith, Warren County Park District

Rosewood | Fundamentals

Building Vigilance, Reducing Risk, and Documenting Success

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Drowning happens quickly and quietly—effective scanning is the first and most important line of defense for lifeguards. This interactive session will break down the science and strategy behind proper scanning techniques, review common scanning mistakes, and explore how supervisors can effectively coach and document scanning behaviors. Participants will leave with practical tools to enhance vigilance, spot subtle signs of distress, and use documentation to support consistent auditing and accountability. The session includes real-world examples of scanning documentation, drills, and supervision strategies to immediately implement at your facility.

Kate Connell, HydroApps

Crown Palm Hut | Aquatics

Crafting Connection: Planning Meaningful Cultural Events for Community Impact

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Explore the art and strategy behind creating culturally rich events that foster community engagement, inclusivity, and lasting impact. This session will guide participants through the key elements of event planning with a cultural focus—from understanding community needs and honoring diverse traditions to building partnerships and measuring success. Attendees will leave with practical tools and creative ideas to design experiences that celebrate identity, promote unity, and spark joy within their communities

Abbey Brooks, City of New Albany; Kayla Hesselbein, City of New Albany; Alonna Skinner, City of New Albany

Cypress | Events

Do You Want to Win or Be Right? The Art of Negotiation and Persuasion

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

You don't get what you deserve. You get what you negotiate. Developing the art of negotiation and persuasion is one of the key soft skills needed to be successful in any job. Need to get your boss on board with your idea? Persuasion.

Working with a developer on a project that can impact or enhance your park? Negotiation. Want your staff to buy into your new direction? Both. People often expect to simply be able to state the facts, and they'll win. When in reality, that is rarely the case. You must rely on strong emotional intelligence to understand what pushes people's buttons, realize when you're being manipulated, identify what your opponent's strengths and weaknesses are, and make people like and trust you. These skills are key to being good at both negotiation and persuasion in all facets of your work.

Jai Cole, Fairfax County Park Authority; Chris Matthews, Mecklenburg Parks and Recreation

Indigo Bay | Management



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

2

Finding the Parks in Your City

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Limited space has led many cities to find creative solutions to provide accessible and convenient parks. This trend can be seen through high-profile abandoned rail line projects like the Highline in NYC or the 606 in Chicago. But smaller municipalities are facing the same challenge. This session will look at innovative solutions for finding community open space in unexpected locations, such as pop-up parks or roof gardens. It will also study how parks can be developed for flexibility and multiple uses.

Jeff Anderson, Upper Arlington Parks and Recreation

Zebrawood | Projects & Planning

The Future is Now—GIS Tools for Park Operations

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Discover how Columbus Recreation & Parks transformed its park maintenance operations through the incorporation of GIS (Geographical Information System) technology. CRPD was able to battle the inconsistency in reporting and unsatisfactory data tracking by utilizing ArcGIS applications. With the need to increase efficiency through multiple team locations spread across the city, GIS provided a platform to create structured team reporting. With the ability to access property information in the field, visualize data, and consolidate information in user-friendly dashboards, the cloud-based application increased the effectiveness of communication between management and field staff. Learn more about the innovative processes created to bring Park Operations into the future.

Taylor Glynn, Columbus Recreation & Parks; Courtney Grumman, Columbus Recreation & Parks

Portia/Wisteria | Facilities/Operations

Mentorship: A Two-Way Journey of Growth

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Mentorship is a reciprocal journey where both mentors and mentees flourish. Gain fresh perspectives on approach, communication, and structure to set your relationship up for success. We will vulnerably discuss the pitfalls and peaks of our mentorship journey. Leave with tools you can use in your next mentorship session. Whether you're currently in a mentorship partnership or you've been hesitant to get started, this session is for you!

Jen Brandt, Kettering Parks, Recreation & Cultural Arts; Gina Kolp, City of Powell

Aloeswood | Human Resources

No One Cares About Your Data

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Do you have the right data, but still struggle to get much benefit from it? Whether you're struggling with an endless influx of survey results, the massive amount of data in your registration software, or to get others to see the value of your reports, learn how three simple questions can help you evaluate and tweak what you collect, measure, and share so that you can decrease the chances that it collects dust sitting on shelves and in your software, and instead, becomes a valuable part of your team's day-to-day.

Bobbi Nance, Recreation Results

Mangrove | Administration



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

3

Practical Steps to Improve Accessibility for Autistic and Sensory-Sensitive Individuals

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

How can you cultivate an atmosphere of inclusivity? Discover how to better understand autistic and sensory-sensitive visitors to ensure your programs and spaces are welcoming and accessible. One in six individuals has a sensory need, and one in 31 children are diagnosed with autism. This session will explore data, needs, and strategies to understand how to make a lasting impact. Cultivating an accessible and inclusive environment is essential to ensure every visitor feels welcome.

Meredith Tekin, IBCCES

Leopardwood | Inclusion/DEI

Teens Vote with Their Feet...and It's Always Election Season!

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

When it comes to recreation programs, teens “cast their votes” by choosing where to spend their time and deciding if your program makes the ballot. This session explores practical strategies for attracting and retaining teens by building programs that feel welcoming, relevant, and fun. Learn how to market effectively and break down barriers to earn their votes. We will discuss ways to build meaningful partnerships, explore approaches to sustaining teen-focused programs even in the face of funding cuts and shifting priorities. Walk away with tools to ensure your programs stay teen-endorsed all year long

Jacqueline Johnson, Portsmouth Parks and Recreation

Ironwood Hut | Urban Rec

Turn Stormwater Infrastructure into Recreation Destinations

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

What if stormwater infrastructure could double as vibrant public space? Discover how a design team in Conway, Arkansas transformed a 1.7-acre downtown brownfield into a dynamic park that can capture 1.5 million gallons of stormwater. Through Low Impact Development and creative grading, civil engineers and landscape architects reimagined detention and infiltration basins—not just to prevent flooding, but to create community. This session offers a compelling case study of function meeting beauty in park design.

Hank Thomas, SWA Group

Sagewood | Natural Resources

Turn Your Playground Dreams into Reality: A Guide to Fundraising & Grants

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Building a new playground is more than just equipment—it's about creating a space where kids, families, and communities come together to grow, move, and connect. But before the first slide is installed or a single swing takes flight, many departments face the same challenge: funding. We know fundraising can feel overwhelming. This session is designed to give you the tools to create a clear plan for success and expert insights to bring your playground dreams to reality.

Jenny Cash, Midstates Recreation

Guava/Tamarind | Fiscal Administration



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

4

Unlikely Community Collaborations

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

This dynamic session explores how senior centers are partnering with unexpected collaborators—such as universities, youth ensembles, pharmacies, and art collectives—to enrich programming, break down stereotypes, and foster purpose and connection across generations. Participants will leave inspired and equipped to foster partnerships that bring fresh perspectives, resources, and energy to their communities

Danielle Brogley, Wood County Committee on Aging

Banyan Hut | Seniors

Monday, February 2, 2026 | 2:30pm – 3:45pm

1,000 Themes for Programs and Special Events

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Need a fresh spark to supercharge your programming calendar? This dynamic session is your ultimate idea generator! Participants will explore an extensive variety of theme ideas—from seasonal celebrations and national observances to pop culture, wellness, diversity, and intergenerational fun. Whether you're planning for a camp, programs, senior programs, or even in the pool, you'll walk away with a ready-to-use collection of themes that inspire participation, foster creativity, and bring people together.

Melissa Hindman, City of Powell; Gina Kolp, City of Powell

Cypress | Events

Advocacy Update

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

The Ohio General Assembly has been busy this session with issues that will directly impact parks and recreation agencies. OPRA Executive Director and lobbyist Woody Woodward will update attendees on what the legislature has done so far and what to expect in 2026.

Woody Woodward, Ohio Parks and Recreation Association

Mangrove | Administration

Aquatic Facility Assessments—What to Expect

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

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. We'll guide you through the process of requesting and preparing for an assessment, ensuring you get the most valuable insights. And through compelling case studies, we'll uncover real-world examples where assessments have driven successful aquatic repairs, transformative renovations, and complete replacements.

*Matthew Freeby, Water Technology, Inc.; Scott Caron, Ballard * King Associates*

Crown Palm Hut | Aquatics



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

5

Beyond Accessibility: Spaces for Every Body to Play and Recreate

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

This session invites participants to reimagine how we design playgrounds and parks, shifting the focus from compliance with accessibility standards to the creation of environments that foster genuine inclusivity. Presenters will highlight their lived experience with disability, sharing stories that illustrate the transformative impact of inclusive design. Participants will leave with practical strategies to create parks and play spaces that reflect and celebrate the diversity of the communities they serve.

Natalie Mackay, Unlimited Play; Shannon Columb, Unlimited Play

Leopardwood | Inclusion/DEI

Emergency Management: Preparedness, Operations, Activations, and Mitigations in Parks and Recreation

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Join us to explore how Seattle Parks and Recreation supports the city's emergency operation center, focusing on two primary responsibilities: Emergency Support Functions in Public Works and Engineering, and Mass Care and Sheltering. Additionally, we will discuss how we prepare parks and recreation staff for various emergencies, including power failures, evacuations, facility lockdown procedures, fires, active shooter situations, special events, and more.

Jon Jainga, Seattle Parks and Recreation

Ironwood Hut | Urban Rec

Evidence-Based Programming Can Be Fun While Promoting Healthy Aging!

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Presenters with decades of programming experience will share options for proven programs that are readily adaptable to many settings and populations. Some programs are tailored for older adults while others were developed for adults aged 18 and older. From Bingocize and Matter of Balance to the latest programs for HIV Self-Management and Caregiver Self-Care, there's an evidence-based model to fit almost any program situation. The results can be so rewarding and empowering for participants.

Stephanie FallCreek, FallCreek & Associates; Jodi Warnecke, Putnam County Council on Aging

Banyan Hut | Seniors

Ex-Tiles: The Truth is Under There!

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Ohio has lost over 90% of its wetlands. With this substantial loss, Ohioans have experienced a degradation of water quality, increased flooding, declining wildlife populations and associated recreational opportunities. This presentation will share information on the history of tile drainage in Ohio and discuss how to locate and decommission these artificial drainage systems in order to restore hydrology and re-establish wetlands for the benefit of the public, wildlife, and the environment.

Mark Dilley, MAD Scientist Associates, LLC; Jenny Adkins, MAD Scientist Associates, LLC

Sagewood | Natural Resources



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

6

Finding or Being the Right Candidate: The Art of the Interview from Both Sides of the Table

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

The interview table can be stressful whether you're the applicant or the interviewer. How do you position yourself to be the top candidate? How do you find that needle in a haystack? What types of questions tend to elevate candidates and what answers set you apart from the crowd? Interviews are an art regardless of which side of the table you're on and our tips are valuable to both. Hear from two seasoned park professionals on how to prepare for the big day, how to nail the interview, and some pitfalls you can avoid to lead you to success whether you're sending or receiving an offer letter.

Jai Cole, Fairfax County Park Authority; Chris Matthews, Mecklenburg Parks and Recreation

Aloeswood | Human Resources

Microaggressions—A Nudge, a Conversation, and a Learning Opportunity

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Microaggressions—the subtle, intentional, or unintentional interactions that communicate some sort of bias. Participants will explore examples of microaggressions and how to recognize possible biases that contribute to them. We'll gain information to reduce microaggressions. Finally, we'll understand that it's about learning how to be empathetic to people.

Lori Hoffner, Supporting CommUnity, Inc.

Indigo Bay | Management

The Money Trail: Proving and Quantifying Your Parks' Economic Impacts

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Understanding the economic impact of parks is critical for justifying funding, guiding policy, and demonstrating community value. This session highlights how anonymized credit card and cell phone data provide powerful insights into recreation spending, visitation patterns, and local economic benefits. Learn how to turn real-world visitor and transaction data into compelling evidence that supports the essential role parks play in regional economies and community well-being. Quantifying impact has never been more important—or more possible.

Michelle Johnson, SmithGroup; Dan Marsalek, Outdoor Sylvania Community Parks

Guava/Tamarind | Fiscal Administration

Rust, Rot, and Revival: Winning the War on Deferred Maintenance

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Cataloguing deferred maintenance in a park is like playing detective in a mystery where the culprit is time—and maybe squirrels. You'll inspect sagging benches, rebellious sprinklers, and swings that scream "retirement." Snap photos, jot notes, and log it all in a system smarter than your clipboard. It's less glamorous than planting flowers, but it's how you catch that cracked sidewalk before it catches a jogger.

Tony Carpenter, MetroParks of Butler County; Ken Carter, Centerville-Washington Park District; Chris Pion, Five Rivers MetroParks

Portia/Wisteria | Facilities/Operations



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

7

Strategic Planning: Rooted in Community, Driven by Purpose

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

A strategic plan shouldn't sit on a shelf—it should shape daily decisions and long-term direction. This session will explore practical approaches for leading your parks and recreation agency through inclusive planning efforts that engage staff, boards, stakeholders, and the community. Learn how to develop a mission-driven plan grounded in community voices, organizational clarity, and actionable priorities.

Paul Khacherian, NPC Strategy, LLC

Zebrawood | Projects & Planning

The Struggle Is Real!

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Did you bring solutions today or just complaints? In an era where real-time access, transparency, and rapid response are the public's expectations, organizations are facing increasing pressure to deliver consistent, high-quality service while keeping the public happy – easy right? Well in these days everyone has an opinion and they want to be heard. Through humor and fun, we will discuss some of the trials and tribulations our agency has faced and how we have adapted (to most) while keeping our sanity...maybe!

Ashlee Schmitt, Greene County Parks & Trails; Robin Gregory, Greene County Parks & Trails; Heather Beals, Greene County Parks & Trails

Rosewood | Fundamentals

Monday, February 2, 2026 | 4:00pm – 5:15pm

Being Prepared!

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Always being ready is key for aquatics professionals. Risk prevention, staying vigilant, and developing and enforcing rules all help prevent incidents and accidents. But what happens when things go wrong? Who's in charge? What's your plan? Where is your support? When will help arrive? How will you deal with the aftermath? These are the questions that three aquatics professionals with over 100 years of combined experience will help you answer.

Jim Clark, Cleveland Parks and Recreation; Chuck Kunsman, Northeast Ohio Aquatic Consulting & Training, LLC;

Annemarie Finch, Mayfield Village Parks & Recreation

Crown Palm Hut | Aquatics

Bikepath Maintenance: Maintaining the Quality that Keeps Users Coming Back

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

This educational session will discuss trail system maintenance from the start of paving a new bike trail to the annual maintenance of the trail. Presenters will talk about the treatments for trail systems to extend the pavement's lifecycle. Together we will share successes and lessons learned over more than 20 years of maintaining paved trails.

Luke Meyer, Asphalt Systems Ohio; TBD Greene County Parks & Rec

Portia/Wisteria | Facilities/Operations



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

8

Challenging Conversations Don't Have to Weigh You Down: Inspiring Communication Success

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

In every workplace, challenging conversations are inevitable. In this session, you'll learn five powerful communication strategies to confidently resolve conflicts. Mastering these techniques will help you foster a collaborative environment, improve staff motivation and retention, and transform difficult conversations into opportunities for growth and success. Join us and thrive!

Lori Hoffner, Supporting CommUnity, Inc.

Indigo Bay | Management

Conservation in Unconventional Spaces

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Learn about Great Parks of Hamilton County's adaptive reuse of an over 100-year-old barn and how the project team created a unique bat habitat integrated into the design. This case study highlights how the team designed and constructed a new bat habitat by providing environmental separation to the areas occupied by people. Learn about planning and construction during migration to have the renovated habitat ready for the bats return during the summer of 2025.

Brett Macht, emersion DESIGN; Kari Horn, Great Parks of Hamilton County; Joe Johnson, University of Cincinnati; Nikki Goldstein, emersion DESIGN

Sagewood | Natural Resources

Inclusive Play Matters: Evidence-Based Design Best Practices for Play and Recreation Destinations

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Thoughtfully break down physical and social barriers to create a welcoming atmosphere and ensure parks intentionally support the developmental benefits of inclusive, intergenerational play! Research findings and new data offer unique insights to demonstrate the positive impact of designing outdoor destinations to address the diverse needs of the whole child, the whole environment, and the whole community!

Ron Blake, GameTime

Leopardwood | Inclusion/DEI

Levy Planning and Campaign Guidance

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Participants will learn common levy options and legislative changes impacting levy decisions. Rebecca and Catherine will provide practical examples of permissible and impermissible campaign activities and communications.

Rebecca Princehorn, Bricker Graydon LLP; Catherine Swartz, Bricker Graydon LLP

Mangrove | Administration



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

9

Master Planning on a Shoestring: Big Results, Small Budget

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Master plans are critical for guiding ongoing improvements, but a successful plan doesn't have to drain your budget. From boat ramps to trails, plazas, and other amenities, a clear, realistic plan can unlock funding that fits your community's needs. This session shows how to build a practical vision and priority list on a lean budget and tight timeline—with real-life case studies, proven success stories, and a focus on local connections and placemaking to strengthen your community.

Matt McGrath, Environmental Design Group; Tom James, Environmental Design Group; Kyle Lukes, Environmental Design Group

Zebrawood | Projects & Planning

Maximizing Cost Recovery: Sustainable Pricing Strategies for Recreation Programs

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Cost recovery in recreation ensures financial sustainability by balancing operational expenses with revenue from programs, memberships, and facility rentals. This presentation explores key strategies, including setting appropriate fees, categorizing services by cost recovery levels, and adjusting pricing based on usage data. Additionally, effective marketing plays a crucial role in maximizing participation and revenue through targeted outreach, digital promotions, and community partnerships. Learn how to optimize cost recovery while maintaining accessibility and quality in recreation services.

Andrew Wildman, Granville Recreation District; Shane McAvinew, Mayfield Village Parks & Recreation

Guava/Tamarind | Fiscal Administration

More than a Medal: The Power of Community Races

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Have you ever hosted a youth triathlon? A community race? Maybe you're unsure of where to start! The benefits of uniting your community and promoting healthy living for all ages are invaluable, regardless of the event type—whether it's a 5K, 10K, triathlon, or fun run. Join us to explore the intricacies of hosting community youth triathlons and their positive influence on communities.

Natalie Mullin, Bexley Recreation and Parks; Taylor Tobias, Grandview Parks & Recreation

Cypress | Events

Partnerships in Acquisitions

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Locating land for expansion of parks, trails, and greenways can be a challenge, although it is the first step in acquiring land. There are many complexities to property acquisition, and this session will assist you in understanding those complexities, how to work through them, and the role land trusts have played in acquiring property for parks. We'll provide examples of Ohio projects from the initial identification of the project and contact with the landowner, through acquisition and restoration on behalf of park districts, municipalities, ODNR, and regional stormwater management districts.

Derek Schafer, West Creek Conservancy; Joe Leslie, West Creek Conservancy

Rosewood | Fundamentals



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

10

The Playbook for Seasonal Staff Success

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Seasonal staff can make or break your summer. With just a short window to train and prepare them, it's crucial to set staff up for success from day one. In this session, we'll dive into the playbook of proven strategies to train seasonal parks and recreation staff efficiently and effectively—equipping them to handle challenges, deliver excellent service, and leave a lasting impact in a short amount of time.

Jacob Hensel, Centerville-Washington Park District

Aloeswood | Human Resources

Racial Equity: From Redlining to Hostile Parkitecture

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

While wealth is a major driver in outcomes, race is the stronger predictor. When studies control for income, racial disparities remain key factors in health, education, employment, and incarceration. Racial equity strategies are currently a major focus of parks departments in large, diverse, urban cities all across the Country – do you have one? Data is important. You want to be able to use it to ensure you are equitably distributing resources, but where else should you be looking to ensure racial equity? Often parks departments build hostile parkitecture that's not welcoming for the intended use or user. Do you have park design elements that unwittingly keep your diverse patrons out? Two park professionals from different urban systems will talk about some of the barriers to equity you may not see, and what strategies you can take to ensure that the predominant race and income of an area does not predict the quality and/or quantity of its parks, and that parks in diverse, low-income areas best reflect the community needs in that area.

Jai Cole, Fairfax County Park Authority; Chris Matthews, Mecklenburg Parks and Recreation

Ironwood Hut | Urban Rec

What's New and Old with Senior Centers

Sponsored By Equitable Advisors

Ohio has seen a recent trend of new Senior Center facility development within parks and recreation. Listen to our panel discuss being involved with Senior Centers moving to new facilities. One moved in 2020, one in Spring 2025, one in Fall 2025, and one early this year. They will discuss what worked, what could have gone better, and what to look for with the latest trends in senior programming and operations.

William Plessinger, Westerville Parks & Recreation; Shannon Guy, Upper Arlington Parks and Recreation; Jill Collins, Hilliard Recreation & Parks; Annette Baxter, Gahanna Parks & Recreation

Banyan Hut | Seniors

Tuesday, February 3, 2026 | 8:30am – 9:45am

Data, Drama, and Clear Decisions

Sponsored By Coaching Skills Academy

You've gathered the data...now what? If your spreadsheets are starting to feel overwhelming, this session will help bring clarity to the chaos. We'll walk through how to interpret key marketing metrics and turn data into actionable strategies that support your recreation programs. Discover how to use insights to guide smarter decisions, build stronger stories, and showcase your impact to stakeholders. Your parks and recreation efforts deserve to be seen – and this session will help make sure they are.

Amanda Morris, City of Hilliard; Amanda Rossbach, City of Hilliard

Indigo Bay | Leadership



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

11

Lead Like a Marine

Sponsored By Coaching Skills Academy

The US Military is world renowned for being the preeminent fighting force. Much of that can be attributed to their leadership development. Regardless of rank, military members are taught the traits and principles to be successful leaders. This session will look at how to apply those concepts in your organizations to achieve mission accomplishment.

Kenneth Stray, Medina County Park District

Mangrove | Leadership

Leadership Toolkit: Transforming a Department

Sponsored By Coaching Skills Academy

Transforming a department means trading smooth scripts for a live-wire circuit board. This toolkit breaks down the essentials so you can tame the complexity, bring your team along, and keep the climb exhilarating.

Alexandria Nichols, Cleveland Parks and Recreation

Guava/Tamarind | Leadership

Leading Beyond the Plan: What to Do When the Unexpected Hits

Sponsored By Coaching Skills Academy

In today's fast-moving public sector environment, crisis isn't a question of if—it's when. What do you do when five key leaders walk out the door, your fiscal foundation shakes, your board leadership shifts, and morale sinks all at once? This session dives deep into what it really takes to lead through unplanned disruption, using real-world lessons from the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. Director Daniel Betts will walk participants through a candid case study of how CRC navigated a perfect storm of staff exits, fiscal uncertainty, shifting board dynamics, and growing community expectations—without losing sight of mission or momentum.

Daniel Betts, Cincinnati Recreation Commission

Salon A | Leadership

Navigating Change with Community Organizations

Sponsored By Coaching Skills Academy

Implementing change in your agency can be complex but beneficial. It becomes more complicated when it involves community organizations like advisory boards, civic groups, etc. This session will cover recent examples of how these organizations were involved, determining their new role and structure, and in some cases, their dissolution, all while maintaining positive relationships with the group and community.

Debbie McLaughlin, Upper Arlington Parks and Recreation; Kayla Sensenbaugh, Beavercreek Parks, Recreation & Culture

Salon H | Leadership



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

12

Supporting the Front Line: Leadership Practices for Stronger Teams

Sponsored By Coaching Skills Academy

Front-line staff are the heart of our parks and recreation services. From maintaining welcoming spaces to delivering meaningful programs, these team members keep our communities running. Yet their needs are often overlooked, which can lead to burnout, turnover, and low morale. This session will explore how leaders at all levels can build strong, inclusive teams by fostering psychological safety, trust, and belonging. Attendees will learn practical strategies to support staff well-being, recognize and address burnout early, and create a culture where all voices are valued. Real-life examples and simple tools will be shared to help leaders strengthen connections across teams and improve overall service delivery. Whether you supervise full-time staff, seasonal employees, or volunteers, you'll leave with actionable steps to help your team thrive.

Sam Jenkins, Empowering Communities

Portia/Wisteria | Leadership

Values in Action

Sponsored By Coaching Skills Academy

Discover how one department transformed its leadership and culture by embedding core values into everyday management. Learn practical strategies to use values as a framework for setting expectations, evaluating staff, and guiding team decisions. This session explores how living your values can build consistency, accountability, and trust across all levels of your organization. Whether you're developing your own value set or refining how you use them, you'll leave with actionable insights to strengthen your leadership impact.

Colleen Light, Worthington Parks and Recreation; Ryan Cooper, Worthington Parks and Recreation

Cypress | Leadership

Tuesday, February 3, 2026 | 1:00pm – 2:30pm & 2:45pm – 4:15pm

The Edge of Creativity

Sponsored By Penchura

Feeling burnt out, uninspired, or stepping into a new leadership role in parks and recreation? Creativity is a vital skill that often goes untapped. In this session, you'll uncover your creative potential and learn how to apply it to enhance programming, engage your community, and drive innovation in your organization. Walk away with actionable strategies to inspire fresh ideas and make a lasting impact in parks and recreation.

Kassi Kincaid, Kincaid Creative Consulting

Salon A | Leadership Series

Embracing the Leadership Challenge

Sponsored By Penchura

Leaders often face challenges —sometimes from within the organization. During this session, Nate will describe challenges he's faced in the hot seat and ways to set expectations. Attendees will examine leadership styles, answer scenario-based questions, and consider ways to improve as leaders.

Nathan Eppink, Medina County Park District

Salon H | Leadership Series



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

13

Embracing Your Authentic, Awkward, Awesome Self

Sponsored By Penchura

Do you ever feel like leadership advice expects you to fit into a mold that just isn't you? What if the quirks you've been trying to hide and the weaknesses you've been told to fix are actually the qualities that set you apart? Through shared stories and lessons learned, Bobbi and Bill will show you practical strategies to succeed without sacrificing what makes you, you, and how embracing your authentic self leads to better results, stronger relationships, and greater satisfaction.

Bobbi Nance, Recreation Results LLC; Bill Tschirhart, Kettering Parks, Recreation & Cultural Arts

Indigo Bay | Leadership Series

Empowered Roles for Great Leadership

Sponsored By Penchura

Join us for a dynamic, research-backed session exploring how empowered roles, communication tools, and the Enneagram drive self-awareness, team insight, and exceptional leadership. Grounded in data and current leadership research, this session offers practical, actionable strategies to elevate how you lead. You'll leave with a clear understanding of leadership dynamics and a toolkit of immediately usable resources to foster trust, clarity, and collaboration with your team. Empower yourself—and your people—for lasting impact.

Tiffany Wood, Spark Impact Coaching and Consulting; Erin Duffee, Hilliard Recreation & Parks

Cypress | Leadership Series

Wednesday, February 4, 2026 | 8:30am – 9:45am

The Art of Dealing with Difficult People in Youth Sports

People can be challenging—especially in youth sports. Navigating the coach-athlete-parent triangle is essential to creating a positive experience. In this engaging session, attendees will learn how to effectively communicate expectations, manage crucial conversations, and develop skills for handling difficult situations.

Chris Stevenson, The Empower Group

Rosewood | Youth Sports

A Beginner's Guide to Adaptive & Inclusive Programming

In this session, we will discuss subjects such as programming, sensory-friendly events, program promotion, and the importance of having adaptive equipment and an accessible facility. Shane will also touch on inclusive terminology, pairing, navigating behaviors, overcoming bias, and tips for working with individuals with a disability.

Shane Thompson, Westerville Parks & Recreation

Leopardwood | Inclusion/DEI

Communication is Key! How to Communicate Effectively in Meetings and Presentations

Clear communication builds trust, saves time, and drives results. In this interactive session, learn practical strategies to communicate more effectively in meetings and presentations. We'll cover message clarity, audience awareness, confident delivery, and engagement techniques so you can lead with impact, whether you're speaking to your team, stakeholders, or the public. Leave with tools you can apply immediately to make your communication more clear, confident, and compelling.

Bill Tschirhart, Kettering Parks, Recreation & Cultural Arts

Mangrove | Administration



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

14

Epic Fails! Top HR Errors that Every Supervisor Should Avoid

Ensure that you are utilizing good HR practices and procedures is critical to avoiding liability for employment decisions. This session will go through some of the top HR/employment law errors to avoid and provide tips on management best practices for handling employee discipline, leave abuse, and workplace accommodations.

Brad Bennett, Bricker Graydon LLP

Aloeswood | Human Resources

The Generational Grove: Growing Stronger as One Team

Today's parks and recreation teams include five generations—from Traditionalists to Gen Z (with Generation Alpha on the way!)—and that includes staff and volunteers alike. This engaging panel discussion features voices from every generation currently in the workforce, offering real-world insight on bridging age-related gaps. Discover practical ways to foster respect, improve communication, and build stronger, more inclusive teams. Leave with tools to turn generational diversity into a true team asset, no matter your role.

Kenneth Stray, Medina County Park District; Isaac Smith, Medina County Park District; John Kleshinski, Medina County Park District; Roberta Gifford, Medina County Park District

Indigo Bay | Management

Involving Your Whole Community to Build a Community Center

Discover how three central Ohio communities—Upper Arlington, Hilliard, and New Albany—successfully built community centers by engaging residents, schools, businesses, and stakeholders. In this session, hear from each city's Parks and Recreation Director as they share their unique paths to funding, public buy-in, and project completion. Learn valuable strategies for uniting diverse voices, securing support, and delivering facilities like The Bob Crane Community Center, The Well, and New Albany's Fieldhouse and Community Center that reflect true community collaboration. Time is built in for a panel Q & A at the end of the session to ask questions of other team members from each community.

Debbie McLaughlin, Upper Arlington Parks and Recreation; Ed Merritt, Hilliard Recreation & Parks; Dave Wharton, New Albany Plain Local Joint Parks District

Portia/Wisteria | Facilities/Operations

Keeping Young Adults Involved After Aging Out of Youth Programs

Youth sports and recreation programs play a vital role in the development of young people, providing physical activity, social interaction, and opportunities for teamwork. However, many young individuals struggle to find ways to stay involved once they age out of organized youth programs. In this session, you will learn effective strategies to retain engagement among youth who have transitioned into adulthood.

Annie Brown, Columbus Recreation & Parks

Cypress | Programming

Practical Applications of AI for Parks and Recreation Professionals

Delve into real-world AI-use cases tailored for parks and recreation. After a quick refresher on AI basics, we'll examine how AI can transform HR processes, marketing campaigns, data analytics, program development, and more. Gain hands-on insights and strategies to implement AI effectively, ensuring your department stays ahead in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Sam Lunt, GovTech Innovators, Inc.; Jason Peters, GovTech Innovators

Guava/Tamarind | Fundamentals



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

15

Using ArcGIS FieldMaps for High-Quality Natural Area Monitoring & Invasive Plant Management

Invasive plant management in natural areas requires thoughtful prioritization because threats are numerous and resources are limited. Come learn about how we developed a rapid data collection protocol and used GIS on mobile devices to sample in high quality natural areas. The protocol was designed to be used by staff who were not necessarily specialists in monitoring natural resources, so training resources were provided. We were able to identify areas of relative high and low quality and produce maps showing their distribution across the gridded areas. These maps are being used to plan management, including invasive plant treatment, and are shared with the park staff carrying out the work.

Kari Horn, Great Parks of Hamilton County; Daniel Kovar, Great Parks of Hamilton County; Jessica Spencer, Great Parks of Hamilton County

Sagewood | Parks

Wednesday, February 4, 2026 | 10:15am – 11:30am

Achieving Success with Programs You Know Nothing About

In parks and recreation, professionals are often assigned to oversee programs they have little to no experience in. Whether it's aquatics, gymnastics, special events, or another unfamiliar area, stepping into the unknown can be overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. Join a professional who's department faced this challenge head-on: learn how they adapted, built expertise, leveraged staff knowledge, and thrived in their roles. This session will provide strategies for embracing new assignments with confidence.

Colton Patak, Mason Parks and Recreation

Cypress | Programming

Building THE Parks Maintenance Dream Team

Discover the keys to building THE Parks Maintenance Dream Team in this dynamic session focused on recruiting, training, and retaining top talent. Learn practical strategies for developing a skilled, motivated crew while fostering a positive, high-performance culture. From onboarding to ongoing growth, explore tools to strengthen team cohesion, boost morale, and elevate your crew's impact.

Kenneth Stray, Medina County Park District

Portia/Wisteria | Facilities/Operations

Community Engagement through Social Media

Community engagement through social media involves using digital platforms to connect with audiences, foster meaningful interactions, and build relationships. It includes creating engaging content, responding to comments, encouraging discussions, and leveraging user-generated content. Effective engagement increases brand awareness, strengthens community trust, and enhances communication.

Kaitlin Duncan, City of Obetz; LeAnna Lutz, City of Obetz

Guava/Tamarind | Fundamentals



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

16

Green Ribbon Initiative - Oak Openings Region

The Green Ribbon Initiative is a shared vision of public and private organizations, landowners, and individuals working to preserve, enhance, and restore critical natural areas in the Oak Openings region of Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan. We engage community members through our quarterly newsletter, volunteer programs, landowner registry, site visits, and more. Learn about all we do to keep our Oak Openings "ribbon" green!

Matty Watkins, Green Ribbon Initiative and The Nature Conservancy

Sagewood | Parks

Parks for All: Serving Neurodiverse Populations in Parks

"These kids are different!" And that's a good thing! Join Meghan Doran and Allison King for a dynamic session on making parks and recreation more inclusive for neurodiverse youth and their families. Learn inclusive language, easy program modifications, and why inclusive design is smart and sustainable. Whether you're a recreation leader, naturalist, educator, parent, or advocate—this is your chance to reimagine spaces and programs through a more thoughtful, community-driven lens. Let's create places where everyone belongs!

Meghan Doran, Summit Metro Parks; Allison King, Dublin City Schools

Leopardwood | Inclusion/DEI

Staff Mentorship in Motion: From Vision to Reality

Looking for new ways to grow and engage your park staff? Join this session to hear how one group of passionate employees designed, pitched and launched a staff mentoring program. We will cover the research and design process through implementation of the program.

Monica Resnik, Great Parks; Amanda Schilling, Great Parks

Aloeswood | Human Resources

Start with Why & End with Growth: Feedback for Real Change

Feedback is a powerful tool—but only when rooted in purpose and delivered with clarity. Using Start with Why by Simon Sinek as a guide, this session explores how to give constructive feedback that builds trust and how to receive it with professionalism. Learn how individuals respond differently, discover simple and actionable strategies, and walk away equipped to create a department culture where feedback empowers growth, strengthens communication, and fuels meaningful progress.

Addie Weaver, Washington Township RecPlex

Indigo Bay | Management

Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Quality Coaches in Youth Sports

Quality coaching is pivotal to the success of youth sports programs, impacting not only athletic performance but also the personal development of young athletes. Unfortunately, many programs face challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled coaches who can inspire, educate, and lead. This proposal outlines a session designed to equip parks and recreation professionals with effective strategies for attracting and maintaining high-quality coaches within youth sports programs.

Annie Brown, Columbus Recreation & Parks; Mackenzie Arens, Columbus Recreation & Parks

Rosewood | Youth Sports



2026 OPRA Conference & Trade Show Education Sessions By Date and Time

17

A Year-In-Review: Parks & Recreation Legislative and Case Law Update

This session will focus on Ohio-specific parks and recreation-related administrative, legislative, and case law updates that have occurred over the last year. Participants will gain a greater understanding and insight into the current and ever-changing administrative, legislative, and judicial landscape affecting the Ohio parks and recreation industry.

Ben Yoder, Bricker Graydon LLP; Sarah Sparks, Bricker Graydon LLP

Mangrove | Administration