

How to navigate CAPRA accreditation and strengthen your parks and recreation department



CAPRA accreditation is a valuable tool for parks and recreation agencies, ensuring high standards, strengthening operations, and securing resources. This guide outlines key steps to help agencies succeed in their accreditation journey.



1. Understand the value of accreditation

- View CAPRA accreditation as more than a designation—it validates operational quality, builds trust with the community, and strengthens funding advocacy.
- Recognize its role in demonstrating adherence to national best practices and improving long-term planning.



2. Start the accreditation process with confidence

- Do not let the fear of failure prevent your department from pursuing accreditation.
- Assess your department's strengths and leverage your team's expertise to meet the required benchmarks.
- Approach accreditation as an opportunity for improvement, not an obstacle.



3. Establish strong mentorship and training programs

- Develop internal mentoring opportunities to build leadership skills and ensure continuity in accreditation efforts.
- Offer hands-on learning experiences for staff, helping them gain firsthand knowledge of accreditation standards.



4. Utilize consultants effectively

- Work with consultants to align strategic and master plans with CAPRA standards for maximum impact.
- Use external expertise for planning, but retain ownership over accreditation narratives to ensure authenticity.
- Avoid relying solely on consultants for storytelling—departments should present their own successes in their accreditation process.



5. Maintain accreditation over time

- Regularly review accreditation standards to ensure continued compliance.
- Build a culture of excellence by integrating accreditation requirements into daily operations.
- Engage staff in ongoing training to reinforce best practices and maintain accreditation status.



6. Empower emerging professionals

- Encourage parks and recreation professionals to step beyond their comfort zones and explore different areas of the field.
- Promote engagement with diverse peers to gain fresh perspectives and deepen expertise.
- Foster career growth by embracing challenges and pursuing leadership opportunities.

By following these strategies, parks and recreation departments can successfully achieve and sustain CAPRA accreditation while strengthening their teams and maximizing community impact.

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